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ABSTRACT

The report details the activities of the Virginia Assessment Study Group in documenting the utility of various approaches to assessing adult education programs and instruction within the state. A group of diverse practitioners convened during 1997 to establish project objectives and research questions and to report on their work. The reports of seven group members, all adult education teachers, concerning a variety of assessment procedures are presented here. The members bring experience from the fields of adult basic education, English as a second language (ESL), correctional education, social services, and family literacy programming. Reports include information about the types of learners and classes involved, the physical setting, class schedules, enrollment procedures, and relevant employment situations. Recommendations for assessment practices and for future study groups emerging from the project are also presented. (Contains 102 references.) (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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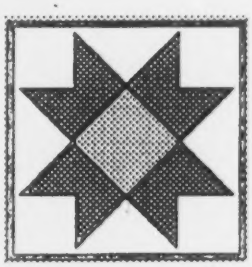
Virginia Adult Educators
RESEARCH NETWORK

CURRENT ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

a report from the
Virginia Assessment Study Group
October 1997



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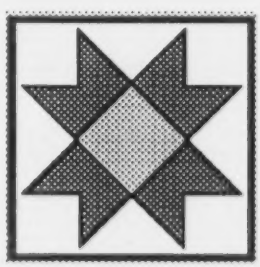

The Virginia Assessment Study Group

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Current Assessment Practices

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Background

In October 1996, the Virginia Adult Educators' Research Network, in cooperation with the Office of Adult Education and the Performance Indicator and Data Work Groups, announced the formation of the Assessment Study Group. Here is how the application described it:

> We need teachers willing to share their teaching and assessment strategies, to explore new activities to improve what they are doing in the classroom, and to document and report student progress. We are forming a study group, to work January through June 1997, to:
> 1. experiment with different types of assessment;
> 2. discover how to incorporate these assessment techniques into everyday teaching and lesson planning;
> 3. describe how each assessment is used in order to build a booklet of best practices;
> 4. observe how the use of these assessments affects teaching practices and program policy;
> 5. find out if the assessments studied are truly helpful to teachers and students; and
> 6. develop ways to document the gathered classroom information and begin to describe ways to measure the information.

Over 60 practitioners responded to the call for teachers interested in sharing their current teaching and assessment practices and exploring new activities about the documentation of adult learning and achievement. The organizers wanted to assemble a group that represented a variety of instructional situations and assessment methods. Besides providing some basic information, applicants had to write about their interests and why they wanted to join. Here are excerpts from the applications of those selected for the Assessment Group:

Tom Bello teaches English as a Second Language (ESL) at Langley High School in Fairfax County. He has worked with adult learners since 1988.

> *I have done so much work with assessment and would like to continue to learn more as a member of the study group because I feel that the students' expressed learning needs play a crucial role in a learner centered curriculum. I also feel that assessment should be a shared venture between the teacher and the adult learner. Assessment should measure progress from a positive, not deficit, model; it should encourage not*

discourage. Assessment should be flexible and, as much as possible, appropriate to the individual learner and to the particular skill being learned. With these ideas, I also bring to the Assessment Study Group an open mind and a desire to learn more.

Sallie Johnson teaches an Adult Basic Education (ABE) class at the Adult Learning Center in Lynchburg. She's been working in adult education for seven years.

Determining the strengths and weaknesses of an individual student is the foundation of effective teaching strategy. Valid assessments provide not only a starting point but an on-going indicator of student progress. Therefore, teaching and assessment are by nature interrelated.

I would welcome the opportunity to experiment with a variety of assessment tools in addition to those I routinely use. I am interested in determining the usefulness of specific assessments in facilitating the teaching/learning process and in studying the validity of such tools for evaluating student progress.

Linda Mattson is an ABE teacher at the Department of Corrections' Day Reporting Center in Fairfax County. She has worked with adult learners for five years.

Participating in the assessment study group would be an outstanding opportunity for many reasons. Assessment is essential to any adult education program; through it we are able to custom tailor an educational program to meet a student's needs. If we can improve the assessment phase of the Department of Correctional Education's programs, we can improve the entire program.

Paula Mullins teaches ABE and General Educational Development (GED) classes at the Wise County Jail and tests clients of Wise County's Department of Social Services. She has worked with adult learners for nine years.

Assessment and testing are of great interest to me. In the past I have done field testing for CTB Macmillan/McGraw-Hill in evaluating their new TABE level E Locator Test, Anchor Test, and Complete Battery (Forms 7 and 8). More recently I did field testing for the Adult Basic Education Technical-Related Academic Career Competencies (TRACC) program. I worked with Nancy Nolen, the ABE Coordinator at the

Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center during two different testing years. This was a rewarding experience for me and my students in Literacy, ABE and Corrections.

Kate Rosenfield teaches adults in a family literacy program in Charlottesville. She has been an adult education teacher for eight years.

One of the components of [family literacy] programs that always seems to be lacking is an effective way of evaluating program results. I have requested information on evaluation, but using assessment tools sometimes requires training or information that I don't have. I would like to be a part of the study group in order to research tools for assessment and to become a better informed and effective teacher. Having credible assessments will also help in requesting funds to keep our programs active in this time of disappearing resources.

Amy Stallings teaches at the Lunenburg Correctional Center in Victoria. She has worked with adult learners for five years.

I taught Learning Disabled students in public schools for 19 years. I have always used various assessments to diagnose specific problems and to develop and implement educational plans for each student. Last February, I began teaching in a correctional center with LIP eligible students [any inmate whose intake reading scores are below the 8th grade level]. I am very interested in learning about and developing assessment instruments that are appropriate for adults. I am presently using parts of various tests and inventories, in addition to the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), although, I honestly cannot be sure that what I am using is appropriate for adults.

Gayle von Keyserling teaches a combined ABE/ESL class in Fluvanna County. She joined the group with one year of experience in adult education.

My interest in assessment tools began with my first ABE class. Actually, in order to be completely accurate, I must state that my interest was a result of the frustration I experienced after trying to implement the tools I had been given for assessment purposes. My first ABE class in our rural county was comprised of ABE, ESL, and GED level students as well as an alternative education student from the high school. I knew from the responses of the students that I needed to do something other than administer the instruments I had been given. The question was what?

Project and Process

We met as a group three times during the project. Our first meeting, January 28-30, 1997, aimed to accomplish the following objectives: 1. to get group members acquainted and familiar with each other's work; 2. to identify the study's goals; 3. to define the research questions; 4. to develop a framework for the group's process; and 5. to create a timeline for the project's activities.

In our opening session, the Study Group members met with Ronna Spacone, Project Facilitator; Joyce Krech, Acting Coordinator of the Research Network; adult education leaders and other practitioners. We heard brief presentations describing interrelated state and national continuous improvement initiatives—all relative to the study of assessment. Brief descriptions of these initiatives follow:

Helping Enhance Learning and Instructional eXcellence (HELIX)

HELIX, an upward spiral, symbolizes Virginia'a initiative for continuous improvement of adult education services. HELIX proposes to institutionalize program improvement by involving all practitioners and learners in the process of generating, acquiring, using, and disseminating information about learning and the adult learning system.

The Virginia Adult Education Advisory Committee has five recommendations for moving adult education in the Commonwealth up the HELIX: 1. Clarify and document the roles and expectations for all practitioners and programs; 2. Provide full-time instructors and managers at the local and/or regional levels; 3. Use technology to enhance learning and professional development; 4. Conduct a promotional campaign that accurately presents adult education's multifaceted delivery system; and 5. Develop a new data system in order to take advantage of the quality indicator system, i.e. performance indicators, standards and measures.

Equipped For The Future (EFF)

EFF is the National Institute For Literacy's (NIFL) process for developing adult education standards and reforming the adult education and lifelong learning system. Virginia is one of 15 states participating in NIFL's long range, standards-based initiative. EFF is built on a view of

adult education as preparation for the future, with learning and teaching contextualized by the key activities that adults typically engage in to satisfy their real world roles and responsibilities. The process is framed by three critical adult roles—worker, parent/family member, and citizen/community member—and four fundamental purposes for learning and literacy. We expect that learning and literacy will enable us to: 1. access information necessary to being oriented in the world; 2. have a voice and be heard; 3. make decisions and be self-sufficient; and 4. build bridges to the future by learning to learn. EFF's four purposes envelope the multitude of goals that drive our quest for learning and being successful at school, home, work, and in the community.

Performance Indicators for Educational Gains

A group of 21 practitioners representing the Virginia Office of Adult Education, the Performance Indicator Workgroup, and the Data Task Force met May 23-24, 1996, to explore the issues related to reporting educational gains and to identify ways to make Virginia's performance indicator and data management system more meaningful, useful, and credible. The group validated the significance of the following points: 1. Context matters in determining educational gains; 2. Educational gains are more than academic progress; 3. Our accountability system needs to include better ways of assessing and reporting non-academic gains. The interest in forming a state assessment study group developed from these proceedings.

Framing the Process

With the above initiatives in mind, our study group reconvened with Lennox McLendon, Associate Director of Adult and Vocational Education, in order to get better acquainted, to share additional information about each other's practices, and to begin defining our work. Our discussion considered the teachers' individual expectations, their issues and questions regarding assessment, and how the previous session would influence their work. It should be noted that consideration of the continuous improvement initiatives became a factor in the project between the applications process and our first meeting, thereby broadening the range of possible focal points and increasing the difficulty with which our group eventually reached consensus on the study's purpose.

Throughout the discussion, we recorded and posted pertinent questions and issues. By the day's end, we had raised 20 questions about assessment, evaluation, reporting, learning, and achievement. (See page 7 for this list.)

The group process of brainstorming, reworking, and refining was painful at times but eventually productive.

The objective of the second day's work was to agree on the study's purpose and research questions. The group decided the purpose of the study would be "to capture the reality of current assessment practices". We defined assessment as "those activities used to determine needs, progress, and understanding" and agreed that collecting, analyzing, and using information were integral parts of the assessment process. Three research questions would guide our investigation:

1. How much time does it take to collect, analyze, and use assessment data?

2. What actually happens when we conduct our assessments?

3. How do our assessment practices influence the teaching and learning processes?

The different experiences and personalities of group members made for lively discussion.

Virginia Assessment Study Group
Questions from the January 28-30, 1997 Meeting

1. What factors contribute to assessment practices being the way they are?
2. Do our current practices mesh with Equipped For The Future's framework of the four fundamental purposes for learning?
3. Can we evaluate learning in terms of the extent to which it enables adults to achieve the four purposes and fulfill real world roles?
4. What is actually happening within our current assessment practices?
5. How is assessment time directed by requirements?
6. How much time does it take to collect, analyze, and share data?
7. What would it take (money, time, and training) to do a really thorough job of assessment?
8. What knowledge and skills do teachers need to do a high quality job of assessment and analysis?
9. How does assessment hinder and/or promote the process of teaching and learning?
10. What kind of learning and achievement are not being measured or reported?
11. How do we know what learners know as a result of our teaching?
12. How can we better match assessment with our learners' goals?
13. How do our teaching styles impact learners?
14. How important are grade levels?
15 How different is what we teach from what we assess?
16 How different is what we assess from what we report?
17. How does the system support or hinder assessment efforts?
18. To what degree do teachers accept that they cannot be all things for all learners?
19. What role does technology play in assessment practices?
20. To what degree does the classroom setting determine the type of assessments used?

Data Collection and Analysis

How much time does it take to collect, analyze, and use assessment data?

What actually happens when we conduct our assessments?

How do our assessment practices influence the teaching and learning processes?

Our discussion then turned to designing a data collection system to use throughout the project. We agreed to document routine assessment practices at least on a weekly basis from February through April. We created a simple form (see page 10) on which to record data and our observations and reflections. As we completed the forms, we focused on our three research question.

Research Question 1: How much time does it take to collect, analyze, and use assessment data?

On the first section of the data collection form, we recorded the following information: 1. assessment means/instruments; 2. program type and location; 3. purpose of assessment; 4. number of learners involved in assessment; 5. number of learners on site; and 6. amount of time devoted to collecting, analyzing, and using the assessment data.

Research Question 2: What actually happens when we conduct our assessments?

Here we tried to provide a more descriptive account of *what had happened*, e.g., where and when the assessment occurred; what was said and done; who was involved; and what the situation demanded of teacher and learner. Background information (relative circumstances, setting, and conditions) was included to establish context.

Research Question 3: How do our assessment practices influence the teaching and learning processes?

In the third part of the data collection process, members reflected on the *effects of assessment*. We wrote about what mattered and what it all meant. We pointed out some of the ways that assessment influences our teaching and asked ourselves what worked, what didn't work, and what could be improved. We reflected on the resources needed to better carry out assessments and what alternative approaches we might use to improve teaching or to enhance learning.

Twice during the data collection phase, group members submitted data logs to Ronna, who in turn forwarded copies to all other team members. In April, we stopped collecting data in order to read and

begin thinking about what everyone had written. What did it all mean? As we read, we noted text items that answered our three research questions. We also used the following questions to help focus our reading and note making:

Are there any problems or issues that need to be addressed?
What are the differences and similarities in how group members collect, analyze, and use data?
What inferences can we draw from reading and thinking about our various assessment practices?

As a result of our reading, we generated a total of 72 questions and issues that we brought to our second meeting on April 18-19. These items helped to focus our discussion and develop the content of our report(s). We decided that each of us would write a separate account of our personal experiences and that Ronna would write about the group process and the group's conclusions. We used our third and final meeting on June 20 to: 1. discuss the report's format; 2. identify final questions and issues; 3. make recommendations for the field's future consideration; and 4. evaluate the process.

What follows are the stories of the seven members of the Virginia Assessment Study Group. Our stories represent the diversity of assessment practice in Virginia. We have each included information about the types of classes and learners involved, the physical setting, class schedules, enrollment procedures, and employment situations. We wrote (and re-wrote) these pieces in order to share our understanding of assessment and to identify and explore our own issues and questions.

"To Capture the Reality of Our Current Assessment Practices"
Data Entry Form

Today's date: _____ Researcher _____ Date of assessment: _____

Program type and location: _____

Assessment means/instruments_____

Purpose(s) of assessment_____

# of learners involved in assessment_____ # of learners on-site_____

Account for your time: 1. collecting_____ 2. analyzing _____

3. and using assessment data _____ 4. additional time spent? _____

_____

Other:

TOM BELLO

Setting

Since 1988, I have been a full-time contract teacher for Fairfax County Public Schools, certified to teach Adult ESL, ESL and History. In the winter of 1996-1997, I was assigned to teach an advanced level (Student Performance Level VII) adult English as a Second Language (ESL) class at Langley High School for the Fairfax County Adult ESL program. Although the program is part of Fairfax County Public Schools, this particular class is self-supporting: each student paid $795 for tuition, $25 for testing, plus approximately $54 for text books. The 12 adult students, aged from their twenties to their forties, came mostly from South America and Asia: Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, and Ecuador; China, Korea, Taiwan, and Thailand. The class met 20 hours a week for 10 weeks (December 2, 1996 to February 26, 1997), Monday to Friday, 9 am to 1 pm. Students received, if they wished, an I-20 student visa, allowing them to stay in the country. Students could enter or exit class at any time; a reduction in tuition payments was made for late entries.

Assessment for Placement

What actually happened: On a pre-scheduled testing date, six students came to be tested and placed for the I-20 program. We have two levels, intermediate and advanced, and students are placed on the basis of their results on three different instruments: an oral interview using the Basic English Skills Test (BEST); a grammar test (Structured Tests of English Language, STEL); and a writing sample.

Time spent: A few minutes of initial contact; 15+ minutes for the oral interview (BEST Test); 30 minutes for the grammar (STEL Test); 20+ minutes for the Writing Sample. Two teachers conducted the testing. It takes 15+ minutes to analyze the results of the three instruments and to place each student, plus a few minutes of final consultation with each student to discuss his or her results and placement. We try to do the analysis of one instrument while a student is completing another instrument, but this is not always possible.

Reflection: Some of our students, especially Koreans, Chinese or Japanese newly arrived in the United States, will have good grammar skills, but can't speak English very well. Other students, especially Mexicans or Salvadorans who've lived here more than five years, will have good oral skills, but weak grammar skills. And few students can write well. Thus for our program, we use a combination of three in-

struments, one for speaking, one for grammar, one for writing. We also talk to the students while conducting the testing. The BEST and STEL are standardized tests; the writing sample and interviews are more informal and provide flexibility to the process.

Needs Assessment

What actually happened: On the first day of class, while going over the syllabus for the winter quarter, I told students that I would try to teach what they wanted to learn, and that they needed to consider what exactly they wanted. We spent the next few days building community; I wanted the students to feel more comfortable with one another and have some sense of how I operated as a teacher. I then explained in detail the needs assessment form, "What Do You Want?" (see p. 19). Basically, I wanted to know their goals in learning English, plus preferences both for content and methodology. Students took the form home in order to spend as much time with it as needed.

The next day, I assigned each section (I-V) of the form to a team of students who gathered answers from the other students. All students were talking to each other, gathering information, and posting results on the board for all to see. At the same time, I also talked to each of the students, asking them to summarize their letters to me (section VI) on what they most wanted to learn. When all students had been solicited and all answers posted, I discussed with the whole class what the results seemed to indicate. After much discussion, I gathered each student's form.

Time spent: 15+ minutes distributing and explaining the form; 1+ hour getting the students to find and tabulate each other's answers and post them on the board and discuss; 15-20 minutes reading and thinking about each student's written response (times 12); 15-20 minutes interviewing each student about learning preferences and goals (times 12).

Reflection: Most adults know what they like and don't like, and if my adult learners do not feel they are getting what they want, they will "vote with their feet." They will leave my class. Therefore, I need to find out early in the course of instruction what they want. Why are my students in my class? What are their expectations? Why are they spending their valuable time and money to come to school?

When I use the term Needs Assessment, I am talking about identifying the students' subjective needs and wants, as opposed to the more objective measures used in the initial placement assessments. Second language acquisition research has shown that "contrary to a great deal

of popular opinion, learners (are) able to articulate long-term goals, and to provide instrumental reasons for attending language classes." (David Nunan, *The Learner-Centered Curriculum*)

I really do try to make my curriculum learner-centered. Based on their own tabulations and on follow-up thinking and interviewing, I spent the rest of the winter quarter trying to provide these students with what they said they wanted. For example, the class was pretty evenly divided between students who wanted skills for their lives and for employment (five) and students who wanted skills for further education (six). For life, students generally need good communicative skills (speaking and listening); for college, students need good grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing skills. Thus this class, as a whole, seemed to be requesting a balance of skills—although by far the most requested language skill was speaking. Students wanted to talk to American friends, write letters, and read stories in English. They wanted to listen to the teacher, didn't want to use class time to work alone, wanted to do homework, work with computers, and take the occasional test and field trip. I told them I would try to do these things.

Perhaps no assessment I did for this class was more important than this Needs Assessment. All subsequent assessments came from and referred back to this one.

As a result of the needs assessment, this class focused on speaking activities; used the computer for writing and wrote letters to me; took tests and field trips. Our reading book, *Arrivals* (Addison-Wesley), was a series of stories written by second language learners like themselves.

As an example, Fern, a student from Thailand, wanted to improve her speaking skills, particularly with American people. We did a series of speaking practices and presentations in class, and I interviewed Fern and tried to speak to her often during the breaks. I also supplied her with a list of volunteer opportunities where she could contact Americans outside of class.

In brief, I always want to know my students and give them what they and I think they need. It is a shared enterprise and an ongoing discussion. Perhaps no assessment I did for this class was more important than this one, and all subsequent assessments came from and referred back to this one.

Assessment of Oral Skills

What actually happened: Because students expressed during needs assessment that they wanted more speaking practice, we did a round of interviews. Each day one student would be interviewed, one question per student, by the other students. That way they could get to know

each other better and practice their speaking. When this initial round finished, I presented the students with another form of speaking practice. Students could choose whether simply to speak about their first day in, and impressions of, the United States, or I could ask them questions. Only this time I would listen to their grammar mistakes and correct the most salient ones with the whole class after the interview was finished.

Since our grammar concentration for the winter was verbs, I focused on their verb mistakes in the context of their speaking. For example, the Thai language does not use the "to be" verb in most contexts, so Fern often speaks without it: "My neighbor very very kind"; "I shy to say Hi"; "First time I afraid with American people." Verbs in Thai, as in Chinese, do not change to show a change of tense. So, when speaking of a past event, Fern would say: "First day when Joe starts his car, the battery dies." Or, again, speaking of the past, "She helps us." I stressed to her and to all the students that English sentences always need a verb, and English verbs change to show a change of time.

Time spent: 20 minutes for the interview and note taking; 20 minutes for analyzing and sharing with the students. (Both activities times 12 students on 12 different days).

Reflection: The needs assessment revealed that students were trying to improve all the major language skills, especially speaking. The students voted to practice speaking through an initial round, then voted to have another round, using the past tenses that we were studying in class, speaking about a topic that they all knew: coming to the United States.

I made corrections and provided instruction in a positive, friendly manner, reminding all the students that we make many more grammar mistakes when speaking than when writing because we don't have time while speaking to correct ourselves.

Assessment of Listening Skills

What actually happened: The whole class was notified the day before that they would take a listening test to help them practice their listening and grammar skills. They had previously taken a similar test that they had corrected in class together. This one I would correct. Listening to the tape played for the whole class, students heard sentences repeated three times and wrote each one down. Then they were given a choice of three answers and asked to choose the answer that best completed the sentence just heard. Students marked their answers and gave the tests to me. I took them home, circled all mistakes, and the next day in

class we listened one last time as I challenged the students to fix their own mistakes. I also answered any questions.

Time spent: 20+ minutes for the test; about 1+ hour for the corrections at home; about 30+ minutes in class the next day going over the corrections and answering any questions.

Reflection: Clear listening precedes clear speech. If you can't hear the sounds correctly, how can you make them? In needs assessment, students said they wanted to practice their listening and test taking skills. Perhaps most importantly, almost half of the class wants to go on to college. The Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA), where many of my students go, uses the Michigan Test as a placement test. This standardized test has a listening component that is 1/5 of the total test (20 out of 100 questions). The University of Michigan, which writes the test, also offers an excellent *Listening Dictation* book that prepares students for this Michigan test and also works to improve listening and grammar skills by choosing sentences focused on different grammar points. Many ESL students have trouble hearing words endings, function words, and auxiliary verbs, generally because these items are unstressed in normal speech. Catching their mistakes during our exercise helps the students concentrate in their own individual problem areas. They also receive good practice for the English placement test at NOVA.

Assessment of Writing and Reading

What actually happened: For a weekend's homework, students were told to write at least a page essay about their favorite things: food, movies, hobbies. They turned their essays in the next Monday; I took them home and focused my corrections on the main idea and overall organization. I returned the corrected essays the next day, Tuesday. Because students had said in needs assessment that they wanted to work on their computer skills, they then took the essays to the computer lab to type them, using Word Perfect 5.1. Students remained in the lab until they had completed their essays. Students helped one another, and I also helped with the word processing. I looked at the essays a second time, paying more attention to grammar and spelling. On Thursday, the students returned to the lab to make final corrections. Before printing, I re-read each essay again, doing a final edit electronically. I also used this time to discuss pertinent grammar mistakes. The students' essays were printed in a book entitled *Our Favorite Things* (available upon request). I complimented each student for her or his writing and gave one book to each student on Friday together with a

series of questions, one for each story. Students took their books home for the weekend, read everybody's stories and answered the questions. On Monday, we discussed the stories and checked their comprehension of each other's writing.

Time spent: Again, there are 12 students. Each essay was critiqued and reviewed three times, first, for clarity and organization; second, for grammar and spelling; and third, for anything missed the first two times. Each review took from 10 to 40 minutes, on average, depending on individual problems and length of essay. Preparing the questions took 20+ minutes. In-class discussion of the stories took 1+ hour.

Reflection: Back in December, students requested help with their writing. Writing is perhaps the most difficult of the four major language skills, but one that students will need both in the workplace and at college. So I give my students a lot of time and attention with their writing. Clarity is the paramount focus: can others understand what you are trying to say? Thus, grammar correction is not an end in itself, but a means to greater clarity. Grammar errors that occur with frequency are addressed with the whole class. Writing assessments are directed toward achieving a product the student will be proud to share with others.

A further assessment was for reading comprehension. Did the students answer all 13 questions? Did they understand each other's stories? In this case, they did. We enjoyed discussing and sharing each other's "favorite things". The final product and discussion were worth the considerable time commitment.

Assessment of Grammar and Vocabulary

What actually happened: Students were told a week in advance that they would be tested using the modal verbs and the vocabulary from their stories in the reading book. We did exercises and writing and speaking practice using the modals. We made sentences and tried to use the vocabulary in conversation. On the day of the test, I told the students I would be willing to stay as long as they needed. The first student finished in 55 minutes, the last in 1 and 1/2 hours. I checked the tests at home, returned and discussed them the next day. We reviewed the modals by putting the "best" answers on the board for all to see and discuss and did the same with the difficult vocabulary words.

Time spent: 1+ hour writing the test; about 15 to 25 minutes checking each test (times 12); 2 hours going over the results and discussing.

The assessment is another process, another step in the journey toward mastering English.

Reflection: Even with a more academic assessment like this one, I do not teach to the assessment; rather, the assessment is part of the teaching. The assessment here is another process, another step in the journey toward mastering English. Students who had written successful sentences (like Gaby from Ecuador, who wrote "My sister has an *aversion* to insects") wrote them on the board to share with all the class so that they could learn from each other. If the students themselves model correct usage, it's better than sentences from a book, dictionary, or a native speaker like myself. Thus going over the assessment provided another step in the learning process. No grades were given; only mistakes were noted and explained. A last follow-up would come with the final exercise the following week.

Final Assessment

What actually happened: Students were given a choice of whether to take a final review of all they had studied the preceding 10 weeks. They chose to take it, and they chose the date. Several days were spent in review. On test day, as soon as students arrived, they could begin this "Final Celebration." Students were allowed to work as long as needed. When all were finished, I took the exams home and graded them over two days. We discussed them in class on the final day.

Time spent: 4+ hours writing the final exercise; 4+ hours for students to take the test while I monitored and answered questions; about 40+ minutes evaluating each "celebration" (what we call "tests") times 12 students; about 4 hours going over the test results.

Reflection: In this final exercise, I attempted to assess "real world" listening skills by focusing on two experiences: a loudspeaker at an airport announcing flights, and a popular song. (We had regularly listened to popular songs in order to practice listening, study idioms, and just have fun.) We reviewed our major grammar focus: verbs. We also reviewed vocabulary, reading and writing, plus learning strategies and American body language. The exercise, driven by expressed student needs and tailored to what we had actually done in class, gave a satisfying (if somewhat exhausting) sense of closure to the preceding 10 weeks. I was proud of the effort that the students had made for the final exercise.

Not to have some sort of final assessment would have left the class somewhat open-ended and unfinished. I think as students participated in this final celebration, they better realized their strengths and weaknesses. I certainly did. For example, Gaby is strong in her verbs, but

still confused about similes and metaphors. Her listening and reading skills are excellent. Her final "book review" from our reading anthology was quite strong. All and all, both Gaby and I felt that she was ready for the next step: college in the United States!

A final note of some pride: all 12 students who had started the class in December took the final celebration and finished the class.

Conclusion

As I look back on this cycle of assessment, I find myself asking: How did I use assessment to improve learning? What was my "philosophy" of assessment? My conclusions are that assessments for adult ESL learners should:

1. Be first and foremost learner-centered.
2. Be from start to finish an ongoing, shared venture between teacher and students as partners in the learning enterprise.
3. Be focused always on a positive, not deficit, model and be built to encourage, not discourage, to show what students can, not cannot, do.
4. Be composed of a flexible variety of instruments, appropriate to individual learners and to the particular skills being practiced.
5. Be designed to assist students toward greater proficiency in English, though English acquisition is not viewed as a final destination. In other words, students are not striving for a final grade, but for a greater sense of mastery appropriate to the individual learner and the skills being attempted.
6. Be fun, if possible.
7. Be always a focus to further learning by teacher and student alike.

Tom Bello
Fairfax County Public School

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

I. WHY I WANT TO LEARN (GOALS)

I want to learn better English to (check ONE)

1. Live better with American people, make more American friends (LIFE)
2. Get a good (or better) job (EMPLOYMENT)
3. Go to college (EDUCATION)
4. Other goal (please write) _____

II. WHAT I WANT TO LEARN (LANGUAGE SKILLS)

The English language skills I most want to practice and improve are (check TWO)
SPEAKING, LISTENING, READING, WRITING, PRONUNCIATION, VOCABULARY, GRAMMAR, SPELLING

III WHAT I WANT TO LEARN (LIFE SKILLS)

I want to learn better English to (check THREE on each side)

(Listening and Speaking)	(Reading and Writing)
1. Talk to American friends	1. Read the newspaper
2. Go for a job interview	2. Fill out a job application
3. Use the telephone better	3. Write telephone messages
4. Talk to the doctor, dentist	4. Read medical information
5. Talk to people at work	5. Write a business memo
6. Talk to people at college	6. Write college essays
7 Understand TV better	7. Write letters in English
8. Understand American music	8. Read stories
9. Other: _____	9. _____

IV HOW DO YOU LIKE TO LEARN (LEARNING STYLE):

PLEASE CHECK FOR EACH:	YES	SO-SO	NO
1. By listening to the teacher	1.		
2. By working alone	2.		
3. By working in pairs (2 students)	3.		
4. By working in small groups	4.		
5. By working with a textbook	5.		
6. By working with the telephone	6.		
7. By working with language tapes	7.		
8. By working with videos	8.		
9. By working with computers	9.		
10. By doing homework	10.		
11. By going on field trips	11.		
12. By taking tests	12.		
13. By other ways _____			

V. HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU HAVE TO DO HOMEWORK OR STUDY OUTSIDE OF CLASS EACH DAY?

VI A BRIEF LETTER (On the back of this paper, please write a letter telling why you are coming to class and what you most want to learn. THANK YOU)

SALLIE JOHNSON

Setting

I teach at the Adult Learning Center located in Lynchburg 's downtown historic district. Our facility is housed in what was originally the John Wyatt School; the Redevelopment and Housing Authority offices occupy the first floor. Two classrooms on the second floor were renovated for our use in 1994-95. The classrooms are bright and comfortable with large windows offering a panoramic view of the city. Our location is convenient to city bus stops, but the stairs leading up to our facility are an obstacle to some students.

Our hours of operation are designed to accommodate a variety of schedules. We are open from 8 am to 3 pm on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday and from 8 am to 8:30 pm on Tuesday and Thursday. Our program is open entry/open exit; new students may begin study at any time during the school year. Our active enrollment (including workplace students) is over 200, and we provide services for over 400 students during the course of a fiscal year.

I teach each weekday from 9:00 - 3:00, but my job is considered part-time with no benefits. There are two full-time teachers, one full-time teacher assistant, and two additional part-time instructors. Our funding is provided through a combination of local, state, and federal money.

Most of our students come to us because they "want a GED ". They have been faced with the reality that high school equivalency is necessary in order to obtain a good job or to enter college. Some want only the personal satisfaction of earning the credential. Several of our students are mandated to attend because of social services requirements or court orders. Students enter the program on all levels—from beginning reader to already prepared for the General Educational Development (GED) exam.

Locator Test for Adult Basic Education

When a student enters our program for the first time, we give him/her a registration card to complete and then administer the Locator (Forms 7&8) of the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE). We explain that our tests are not passed or failed, that they merely give us an indication of what the learner already knows. Our adult education staff functions as a team; while one teacher might begin the testing process with a student, another might do the scoring or utilize the results.

We do not enforce time limits on tests; we hope that giving students as much time as necessary cuts down on test anxiety. Since we do not have a place to test in which quiet is guaranteed, perhaps this time flexibility helps to compensate.

Since our assessments are administered individually, other students in the classroom are engaged in their individual programs of study, including computer applications, textbooks, audiotapes, and videotapes. We do not have a separate room for testing, and rarely is the room completely quiet. Conversations are going on from time to time, students are coming and going, and the telephone is frequently ringing. We do not enforce time limits on tests; we hope that giving students as much time as necessary cuts down on test anxiety. Since we do not have a place to test in which quiet is guaranteed, perhaps this time flexibility helps to compensate.

When the Locator is completed, the reading and math sections are considered independently of one another. Often there is a disparity between reading and math; I administer different TABE levels accordingly. If a student answers at least 14 out of the 17 reading questions correctly on the locator (7&8), I administer the reading sections of the GED practice test instead of the TABE.

I share TABE results with students, but not in terms of "grade levels ". If the grade equivalency comes out at 7.2, I communicate a score of 720 (multiply by 100) and explain that a score of 950 or above is the GED level. Comparing a current score to a goal of 950 is less intimidating than a grade level associated with children.

I spend about 20 minutes of my time administering, scoring, and utilizing results of a formal assessment for initial placement. TABE scores, however, provide only an estimate of a student 's current functioning level. Since the TABE is a norm-referenced test, I do not depend on it as a criterion-referenced instrument to target specific skill deficiencies. (I have not found the TABE to be reliable for that purpose.) I often follow up with an informal assessment, such as a textbook exercise or a teacher-made instrument.

For math I give a review of whole numbers, either the Number Sense diagnostic test or my own whole number inventory which includes finding averages and other word problems. Then I can pinpoint specific skills that the student may need to work on. A higher level student may be given an inventory of decimal skills or multistep word problems. For reading, textbook pretests are useful for identifying problem areas; a learning plan is developed accordingly.

Informal Assessment

In addition to skill assessment, learning style preferences must be acknowledged. I do not formally assess learning styles, but students give

clues as to their personal preferences. Some students seek solitude and want only a minimum amount of input from the teacher. Others need frequent verbal instruction to help them understand new concepts and to keep them focused. Most students enjoy the computer and benefit from using appropriate software, but a few lack the manual dexterity to use the mouse and/or keyboard and find the computer frustrating. Some students are auditory learners and enjoy using audiotapes to enhance their reading or to learn multiplication tables. Many students benefit from watching a GED video, but others fall asleep while watching!

Each assignment, as it is completed and checked, provides an on-going informal assessment of the student 's understanding of specific skills. Does the student need additional practice or can we move on? Informal assessments provide me with day-to-day feedback that is essential for setting the pace of instruction. Some students may grasp a concept with a minimum of practice; other students may exhaust all of our resources before a concept begins to take hold.

In addition to daily assignments, an occasional cumulative review is necessary to assess whether a student has retained those skills which were introduced earlier. I don 't do this as often as I should, but there is no substitute for keeping skills fresh in a student 's mind. I usually use an informal assessment such as a textbook exercise or a computer application. Formal assessments such as the TABE or GED practice test can help to fulfill this function, but I receive better feedback on retention if the review is specifically correlated to skills which have already been introduced. Then I must re-address those skills that have been "forgotten".

Time

Informal assessments are such an integral part of my daily interaction with students that it 's hard to assign a time frame. I am familiar enough with our resources to be able to utilize results within 5-10 minutes. This includes checking answers, determining whether or not the student understands the concepts, and providing materials accordingly.

If I administer a section of the full-length (Form FA) GED practice test to a student who is scheduled to take the GED exam, I spend more time analyzing data. Since incorrect answers are representative of those that may cause trouble on the actual GED, the student and I might spend 45 minutes discussing questions which were missed. Although the half-length practice test is useful for predicting scores, it simply doesn 't have enough questions to provide an overview of skills. The

Effective teaching is so intricately tied to assessment that trying to accomplish one without the other is at best a longshot, at worst an exercise in futility.

28 questions on the math half-length test provide a random sampling of topics, while the 50 questions on the full-length test provide better coverage of the subject.

Since adult students often feel pressure to accomplish much in a short period of time, I feel that I must do everything possible to ensure that their time is well spent. Effective teaching is so intricately tied to assessment that trying to accomplish one without the other is at best a longshot, at worst an exercise in futility. A valid assessment, whether formal or informal, tells me what to teach, when to move on, and how well each objective has been accomplished.

Sallie Johnson
Lynchburg Adult Learning Center

LINDA MATTSON

Setting

The position I hold was the first of its kind in Virginia. In the summer of 1993, I joined the staff of Virginia's first Day Reporting Center (DRC). My responsibilities include teaching basic literacy, GED prep, and affective domain lifeskills to offenders in Fairfax County. I am employed 30 hours per week for a maximum of 1500 hours per year. Although I am the only educator at this facility, I am supported by a principal in Harrisonburg and central office staff for the Department of Correctional Education (DCE) in Richmond. I am accountable to them and have always been able to call on them for help, resources, training, and advice. However, in the day to day operation of the program, I'm pretty much on my own.

Offenders are mandated into our program either by the parole board, judges, or parole/probation officers. Referrals seem to come in waves, but basically clients are entering and exiting our program on a weekly basis. Once in the program, they may stay as long as a year. We usually have 85 to 90 students, mostly male. Most are substance abusers, which greatly complicates educational issues. In addition to intensive supervision and my services, clients receive on-site drug treatment and monitoring. They also have the services of a social worker who specializes in offenders' issues. Quite frankly, with all these agencies vying for the opportunity to provide services for these clients, education is usually not a priority for them.

Students meet with me either in my office or in a large conference room which doubles as a classroom and meeting room for other groups. If the large room is available, as it is during my Monday and Wednesday morning sessions (10:30 - 12:00), students sit at a 2' x 4' table to work. The floor is carpeted and the furnishings are modern. (However, I must note that one student recently complained that he could not work because there are no pictures on the wall!) Sometimes we are disturbed by parole officers who use the room as a passageway to their offices beyond. Staff members can be heard laughing and talking in an open area near the room.

On Monday and Wednesday evenings (5:30 - 7:00), GED students must use my office because other groups are meeting in the large room. There are plans to move my group into an open reception area adjacent to the meeting room, but so far the class has remained small enough that a move hasn't been necessary. If we move to the open area, I will not have access to a copy machine or to my office where

materials are stored during class. At this writing there are six people regularly attending the morning class, and an average of three in the evenings. My office is extremely cramped with more than this number, but it works well enough with only three learners. At times, when there has been a fourth in attendance, I have had to station him at a desk in the open area outside my office. I leave the door open partly for security reasons, but mostly because it's just plain stuffy with four people. Unfortunately, sound carries extremely well through the duct system, and we can often hear and understand what is being said in the group meetings across the hall as well as in conversations between surveillance officers and offenders.

I often have a difficult time getting started on time. Clients are frequently late, only to arrive and be further delayed in order to leave a urine test. This entails waiting until a Department of Corrections staff member is free to administer the test. I've lost as much as half an hour of available time for this reason. Consequently, I never wait until all expected clients have arrived to begin class. If someone arrives five or ten minutes early, I begin the testing procedure as soon as possible, but the student may then be disturbed by the arrival of another student.

Assessment Interviews

New clients' first exposure to the DRC is through an orientation with one of the parole/probation officers. They then enter the assessment phase of the program, during which they are interviewed by the social worker, the substance abuse counselors, and me. Just before the interview I read the client's Pre-Sentence Investigation (PSI) report which includes information about education prior to incarceration (for a parolee) or prior to sentencing (if on probation). Often this information is outdated and at times is in error. The investigator attempts to verify diplomas or certificates, but this is not always possible. When I interview the client I attempt to update or correct this information. I must do this for every client who enters our program, no matter what educational credentials are claimed (i.e. college degree, high school diploma, or GED.)

Over the years I have developed a list of questions to determine the suitability of my program for these clients:

What was your last grade completed in public education?

Do you already have a GED?

Have you ever worked toward a GED? Taken the GED test or practice test? If yes, what were your scores? (I usually have to request these from the DOE in Richmond.)

Were you ever in Special Education classes?
If so, for how much of the school day?
How do you feel about working toward the GED?
Which were your best subjects when you worked on the GED?
Which gave you the most trouble?
Which subtests had the highest or lowest scores?
What are your other commitments? (to determine class placement.)

Informal subjective assessment has a real place in my adult education program.

If a student is obviously a literacy level learner, I tailor my questions to fit. I ask about schooling levels, whether special education or regular, and which subjects were easiest and hardest. I ask about other adult education programs participated in, and if any of the books on my shelf are familiar from previous studies.

As an assessment tool, these interviews serve many purposes. They make me aware of a potential student's commitment to further education, attitude towards working on a GED, and general education and functional literacy levels. For example, if a client brings in numerous certificates awarded for skill mastery or for attendance in an adult education program I know that this is an individual who values learning. If a client carries a novel and has been reading in the waiting room, I know I have an individual who will succeed. Thus, informal subjective assessment has a real place in my adult education program.

If I am able to obtain current (within the last year) information about previous adult education programs or test results, I usually will not do further testing on intake, but place a student at the level indicated by this information. This works well with parolees who have recently been in DCE programs in state prisons and have therefore taken either the TABE , GED, or the practice GED. Local adult education programs are also helpful. (But wouldn't it be wonderful to have a central computer network with test scores on any adult in the state who had been enrolled in an adult education program?)

Once a client has been interviewed by the three service providers, and the staff agrees that the DRC program is suitable, an individualized contract is signed. This contract spells out what services will be received and what the student's responsibilities are. Technically if a student fails to follow through with these responsibilities, a sanction may be issued.

One factor that I feel has an impact on every aspect of my program including assessment is that most of our clients are substance abusers. This impacts my program in several ways that I can directly observe, and in many that I cannot. My students may be under the influence

when they arrive, may be in withdrawal, may be sent to detox or residential treatment. I'm never really sure what their true ability is, and how much affect drugs have on their performance. (One substance abuse counselor told me I should be sure to test addicts when they are under the influence as they perform better then.)

Assessment Testing

Based on the interview and information in the DCE file, I may elect to administer either a practice GED or the TABE. This may take two or three sessions depending on the client's employment, use of public transportation, participation in groups, or other issues. This is not a problem, as I see it, as our clients tend to have limited attention spans and don't do well in sessions lasting over about 75 minutes. Testing is done in my office or in the large conference room. I have never had to test more than two students at one time; but I often have to test one or more students while others are working. Since I have no aides, this does get a little difficult.

If my interview has indicated a need, I acquaint the learner with the GED or the TABE before testing. I explain the kind of material covered, the length of time required to take both the GED and the practice test, and Virginia's requirements for passing. Especially for literacy level clients, I spend time trying to make them more comfortable with the test. I try to make all prospective students feel it is a method of allowing us to be more efficient in our use of time by letting us skip material already mastered.

Most recently I have been giving just the TABE Locator test if a learner seems to be on the literacy level. I feel it gives me enough information without exhausting the learner with hours and hours of test-taking. These same students will be given the entire TABE in August and again in December, so I don't feel they are "slighted" in any way.

For those students who have been working on their GED elsewhere but have no scores, I had been giving the Practice GED test. However, that test is extremely time-consuming to grade, as it must be done by hand. It indicates only that an individual should study for a particular sub-test. To correlate each question to a skill and subject area—analysis/economics, for example—is prohibitively time-consuming; however, I have done just that for math. Another disadvantage to the Practice GED is the shortness of the test.

Recently, I have been administering a number of the "predictor tests" from the front of study books. These have the advantage of providing

charts which correlate each question to both reading skill and subject area. I go over the completed test with the student and fill in the chart with the areas in which further study is needed. Usually these charts indicate the pages in the book where each skill is taught. I explain this to the student and we discuss a "plan of attack" for developing these skills (i.e. the order in which they should be done, whether the learner will go straight through or intersperse math with other subjects, whether work will be done at home or only at the DRC, and my expectations of what will occur during class.)

Informal Assessment

Assessment does not end with the completion of tests. As many of my colleagues in the study group and outside it have said, assessment is on-going. I illustrate this with a student who is new to my program. Stacy is a 38 year old woman who is working on her GED in my morning class. Right now her concentration is on math. Her pretest, the practice GED, revealed mastery of basic math, but some problems beginning with decimals. However, as she began working in this area, I quickly realized that she had forgotten operations with fractions—something she got right on the test. I was able to make that determination because I assessed each problem as she did it during her first few days in class.

This process of informal assessment is so well integrated into the teaching/learning process that I never really analyzed it until now. Upon reflection, I realized how the assessment occurred. I was able to learn which skills Stacy lacked by the questions she asked and by the kinds of mistakes she made. The formal test didn't give me this information; in fact, the formal test was somewhat misleading. Through immediate, ongoing informal assessment I was able to determine that this learner didn't know how to divide fractions even though she had gotten questions dealing with changing decimals to fractions right on the formal assessment.

Time

The time it takes to assess one student is determined mainly by that student's level of academic competence. Generally speaking, the lower the functioning level of the learner, the more time it takes for the administration of the test. For a literacy level learner, it typically takes me an hour or more of one-on-one involvement in initial assessment. For a GED student, it takes 4 hours of the student's time to take the practice

The information derived from informal assessment can never be measured, but it is the real substance of adult education.

test; however, I spend about five minutes at the beginning of each subtest (for a total of 25 minutes) with the student. I keep time and check that the student is following directions but carry out other tasks while the student is working on the test.

Time spent analyzing the test (checking answers, computing scores and grade levels, preparing lists of skills to be learned) is about an hour for each initial assessment of each student. In my program I do all this by hand. While that may change in the future, I test so few students at one time that scoring by computer is not cost or time effective. In the past I found that the computer generated printouts of skills mastered/skills deficiencies on the TABE was very helpful. I sent off the answer sheets and within a week, I had them back. I spent 2 or 3 minutes studying each one, 2 or 3 more interpreting it for the tutor working with a particular student, and 15 minutes interpreting it for each student. With the help of my tutors, I then selected appropriate materials and the student moved on from there.

Conclusion

How does assessment affect learning/teaching in my practice? Identifying strengths and weaknesses allows me to set objectives for the learner; determining a present level of performance guides me in the selection of materials; and isolating gaps in previous learning or identifying things the learner has forgotten tells me when to let a learner work independently, when to step in with help, or when to take another approach in explanation.

I have always valued formal assessment as a validation of teaching/learning, for accountability to funders and other authorities, and as a validation for my learners and myself. However, reflecting on the assessment process (as this study group has forced me to do), has convinced me of the importance of informal ongoing assessment that is done on a daily basis. As the example of Stacy illustrates, the measurement of the time spent in on-going informal assessment is impossible to pin down. It is woven so intricately into the fabric of day-to-day instruction that you don't even realize that assessment is taking place or is assessment. However, this type of assessment provides information that is at least as valuable as that provided by the more formal kind. The information is immediate and so is your response to it. It has the greatest impact on learning, for through it the instructor prevents learner frustration and burn-out, changes materials or approaches, provides explanations, encourages, or leaves the student to accomplish on his own. The information derived from informal assessment can never be measured, but it is the real substance of adult education.

Postscript

While my principle job is with DCE at the Day Reporting Center, I also have significant experience assessing adults' educational needs outside that setting. From January of 1994 until July of 1995 I served as a learning disabilities consultant for the Literacy Council of Northern Virginia. My job was to administer an assessment to learners who, in the opinion of their volunteer tutor, were not making progress. I administered a test devised by the Greater Richmond Literacy Council called the "Adult Screening Key" based on the "Screening Test for Adults With Learning Difficulties."

I administered this test one-on-one to about 50 learners during that time. Administering the test took 50 to 70 minutes. Checking it took another 30 minutes. When that was done, I interpreted the results and wrote a one-page report advising the tutor which modalities were strongest for the student. I also recommended specific teaching strategies the tutor could use with the student, and sometimes suggested a change in materials. I provided the tutor with an independent reading grade level, an instructional level, and the student's frustration level. Writing the report took from 1 to 1 1/2 hours for each learner. After the tutor had time to read it, we met for about an hour to discuss the contents.

I also interviewed the learner about interests, hobbies, and desire to read better. I found that talking with these learners revealed much about their learning strengths and weaknesses. For example, a woman who likes to sew and knit would be a good tactile learner. One talented in music would be strong auditorily. As I administered the formal portion of the test, it almost always bore this out. Again the informal assessment proved at least as valuable as the formal one.

Linda Mattson
Fairfax County Day Reporting Center

PAULA MULLINS

Setting

Like so many adult educators I wear a variety of hats, and use testing and assessment in different locations. Mainly, I am Lead Teacher for Wise County and the City of Norton, where 40 low-level readers are being served. I also test clients of the Wise County Department of Social Services and teach GED classes at the Wise County Jail. These programs are funded for Region I Adult Education by grant money from local, state, and federal institutions. I am an hourly, part time (22 hours/week) employee of the Wise County Schools.

Our student referrals come through the Virginia Employment Commission, Department of Social Services, media advertising, corporations, schools, and students' friends and relatives. Because of Virginia VIEW (Virginia Initiative for Employment not Welfare), many clients of Social Services are mandated to attend class. And often, in the corrections programs, a stipulation for parole includes a GED diploma.

In both my reading and GED classes, I use informal, formal, and computer-assisted inventories, the Tests for Adult Basic Education (TABE), Student Teacher Evaluative Planning Sessions (STEPS), and the Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT).

Student Inventories

Our classes have open enrollment, so at any time during the year I may administer an informal inventory to an entering student by asking him to help me fill out a specially designed folder. Through this process, he is introduced to the class, gives statistical facts, shares hobbies and interests, specifies academic goals, and signs a learning contract.

Obtaining a student's name, address, and telephone number is a nonthreatening procedure. Asking questions about previous education and children initiates conversation. Most importantly, discussing educational needs and goals allows a student to take ownership of his academic future as a co-learner with me. This informal inventory takes from 15 to 30 minutes, but it covers information that I use for the rest of the year. Of course, it also aids in the STEPS process we do in class every month.

I use the term "formal inventories" for those activities which give me some sort of concrete result -- a diagnosis, level, or score. I also in-

clude progress reports or completion of specific assignments. While collecting data for this project, I did not include homework items that I corrected or graded to put in the student's portfolio, such as spelling, math, or essays. However, I did document a request by a 50 year old low-level reader.

We were studying math, and he mentioned a goal to someday learn his social security number. I looked it up, wrote it on the white board, and we began to recite the nine numbers aloud. At the end of class I left him with the assignment of mastering it by our next meeting. During the next class he confused two numbers. I wrote it out again; we talked about the rhyme, timbre, hyphens, and location of the numbers. By the next class period he had learned his social security number.

Counting class and homework time, it probably took less than an hour to achieve this feat, but the student and I felt such accomplishment. He realized his dream of memorizing the number that he had been called upon to recall for 35 years. While some may excel in algebra or biology, a highlight of the school year for this reading student was learning his social security number. I made note of it in his folder, but how do I show Richmond [Department of Education] this huge achievement and concrete result?

Computer Assisted Inventories

I have been assigned a Tandy Notebook Computer that I carry into my class sites. While at the Wise County Jail I gave the class instruction on its care and use, and then a new student asked if he could try it. I enrolled him in an assessment program called "Arithmetic Placement" (Educational Activities Software). Soon I discovered that he had not listened to the complete instructions I had given. He also did not read the on-screen instructions and did not know to use the TAB key when he entered an answer that was in fraction form, or if he was supposed to reduce the answer to lowest terms. I helped him over these hurdles and he did very well.

The computer assessment took him 45 minutes, during which time I continued to teach the rest of the class. I spent about 5 minutes discussing the diagnostic results that I pulled up on the screen. The learner was pleased with the results and that he had used a computer to obtain them. I learned that it is necessary to emphasize, more than once, the importance of reading every word on the screen. Programs differ in how answers are chosen and entered. In the future I will stress the importance of reading the directions. It is my responsibility to help create an environment conducive to learning.

One of the menu listings on the computer is a "Learning Styles Inventory". This program is user-friendly and asks the student 40 questions about how he learns best. The student chooses from "1" (least like me) to "4" (most like me) in answer to queries about oral, aural, and kinesthetic preferences. I am able to display on the screen a bar graph compilation of the learner's responses. The final screen offers a personal diagnosis for teaching according to his learning style.

After using this in class with two inmates at the jail, we reviewed the on-screen results together. I explained unfamiliar terms such as "visual mathematics." The students liked this tool and its personal application. They agreed that the diagnoses revealed their likes and dislikes accurately, and perhaps it was the first time they realized how they learn most effectively. This evaluation took about 30 minutes for each inmate to complete. Discussing the results took ten minutes, but using the diagnoses is an on-going process. Looking at their goals from the initial informal inventory, I make lesson plans and endeavor to teach according to each of their learning styles.

I also teach a class of females in the jail. After telling them that my laptop computer is fragile and expensive, I explained how simple it is to use. One student began the Vocabulary Placement on the computer while I guided another student in writing, and quietly graded essay homework. Again, I had to remind the student using the computer to pay close attention to the screen instructions. While she was taking the test, I asked her a question about her written essay. She paused and smiled, saying, "I'm listening to you." But she did not take her eyes off the screen. Later she said, "Wonder [what I do] if I don't know what the word is?" I told her to write it down and we would go over it later. Going over the care, rules, uses, and abuses of the laptop took about 15 minutes of our beginning class time. The computer placement took 30 minutes. Our discussion of the words she missed (using them in sentences and giving the definitions) took no more than 5 minutes.

When the screen showed the student's vocabulary level as 5th grade, she thought that the test's words were more difficult than that. In my experience, computer-generated tests have a greater degree of difficulty than paper and pencil ones. Her comments caused me to get out the TABE vocabulary test that has words up to the 7th grade level. We spent another 10 minutes comparing the two tests and decided that the computer test was harder, but using the computer was not. She had never touched a computer before; now she can say she has used a laptop. It made her feel good about herself.

The computer is a good tool for assessment, as well as an enhancement to self-esteem. Usually, 30 minutes on the computer also provides a

lesson in keyboarding and computer use. I tell the students that it looks good on their resume to be computer literate.

Tests for Adult Basic Education (TABE)

Discussion of the results is important. The numbers alone do not tell the whole story.

The TABE is an effective tool for obtaining reading and math levels. After the informal inventory is completed for a new student, I administer the TABE Locator test. This is an assessment of vocabulary and math, and the score is used to determine placement in TABE levels (Easy, Medium, Difficult, or Advanced). I give this test more than any other, using it in the reading program with clients from Social Services, as well as with my GED students in the Corrections Program. If I see that a student is struggling to read the directions, follow along with the Practice Exercises, or complete the Locator test, I then use the SORT and record the reading level only.

At the Wise County Department of Social Services, I test clients each month in preparation for the welfare reform program, Virginia VIEW. After the students complete the tests, I document their reading and math levels and give a copy to Social Services. I also recommend whether they need to be enrolled in our reading, GED, computer, or workforce programs, or I suggest they attend the local community college.

Usually about half of those who were sent appointment letters actually come in for testing. We meet in a big conference room that is well lit, comfortable, and near restrooms. After initial introductions and enrollment, we go over the directions for the Locator, and do the 12 Practice Exercises together. I use words like "evaluation" instead of "test", and I remind them that I do not count wrong answers, only what they mark correctly. They are timed separately on the Locator and each reading and math portion. I number each seat and keep track of the time stipulated for these standardized tests. Some clients use the entire allotted time, while others finish early and are able to take a coffee break.

After the students complete the reading and math tests, I go over the results with them. When one student's reading level was 12.9, I commended him for doing so well on the Vocabulary and Comprehension Tests. He told me that he could not spell well, did not know punctuation or grammar, and could not write an essay. So discussion of the results is important. The numbers alone do not tell the whole story. Sometimes I observe learners who hold their test booklets close to their face, or turn a "good ear" to hear me better. These are red flags that cause me to speak privately to them about any sight or hearing problems.

Some of these clients may already have their GED or a high school diploma, but they are still required to take the evaluations. If their reading and math levels "top out" at 12.9, I am not allowed as a reading teacher to enroll them as students, even though I have spent this time testing them.

During the winter months our room at the jail is really warm. The chairs squeak, doors clang, and around us commodes flush and inmates yell. Many of the incarcerated students are learning disabled and cannot tolerate all these distractions in an academic setting. One 17-year old told me that it "mixed him up" to take a math test while the rest of us in class were doing math.

Remembering past failures, being subjected to poor environments, being timed, and being inexperienced all take their toll on students. Their comments include: "Most reading I've done in a long time." "It was hard. On that last one I had to read over and over." "I hate math." "I don't like to read." and "That noise is getting to me; it's making me nervous."

Taking care of the preliminaries and doing the practice exercise takes 20 minutes. The time it takes to complete each test are: Locator, 37 minutes; reading, 54 minutes; and math, 80 minutes. Scoring the TABE takes only a few minutes; analyzing the results, preparing lesson plans, and then teaching new concepts can take hours. I use correlating and supplemental materials relating to items they miss on the TABE. I make up worksheets, assign an individual reading teacher if necessary, and give the students textbooks marked at the place where they need to begin studying.

Student Teacher Evaluative Planning Sessions (STEPS)

In Region I, our practitioners are instructed to use STEPS beginning with the 2nd class meeting and continuing every 6th class thereafter. Actually, I use these sessions as often as appropriate to evaluate which parts of the instructional program are working, and which are not. In the student folders there are spaces reserved for six STEPS sessions. The student writes his comments, and may read mine.

Since I use the first class period to administer the TABE, students do not have enough classroom experience to answer the STEPS questions in the second class period. Also, in relation to the time involved and the expectation of changing goals, I think that using STEPS with every student every six meetings is a bit excessive. It becomes more and

more difficult to come up with inventive ways to ask the same questions over and over.

With a non-traditional learner who could not write because of a handicap, I used a STEPS questionnaire sheet, asked the questions orally, and wrote down his answers. If I had just asked "yes" or "no" questions, he would not have been allowed to share the progress he had made or his strengths, weaknesses, and preferences. We mutually discussed categories such as progress, learning evaluation, time commitment, teacher help, goals, and changes.

Some revealing things came out of this student's assessment. He told me what material was "too easy", so I will either accelerate or skip entirely those lessons. He enjoys vocabulary words, so I will look for new and different resources. He said, "The more you talk, the more I learn." He also wished we could meet more often, sadly saying, "No one has time to listen or talk." I was able to arrange for us to meet an extra two hours a week. I found out his need for more attention, the fact that he is an auditory learner, and that some material is boring him. I have learned from his openness; he will reap the benefits by being the center of his learning goals; and I will be a more effective teacher for him.

To administer STEPS this way takes about 30 minutes, but using the assessment data, making changes in lesson plans, and obtaining applicable study helps, can take hours. The reason for using STEPS is to involve the learner in the planning process. Hopefully, it makes my classes more student-centered, as the student claims ownership of his learning.

Slosson Oral Reading Test (SORT)

The SORT is a quick way to obtain a reading level. The student reads aloud from a sheet of 200 words divided into 10 lists that get progressively harder. When he is unable to read all 20 words in a list the test is over. Reading level is determined by counting the number of words read correctly and dividing that total by two. The problem, of course, is that it is a decoding exercise only. This assessment is used for the low-level reader who cannot take the TABE.

Slosson instructs that this test "takes about 3 minutes to give and to score". This is certainly not the case when one follows the instructions and gives the student about 5 seconds on each word. I administered the SORT to a stroke victim at Heritage Hall Health Care. We had to move out of the dining area because of a woman's loud screams. In the

"great room" where we settled, music was playing overhead and that was interrupted periodically by calls for a nurse. People came in, sat, talked, and walked through while we were trying to have class. The first three word lists have large print, and the student did well on them. Then the size of the font changed and made the rest of the test bothersome for him. The adult learner looked away from the SORT with each movement around him. He lost his place and his concentration.

After the test, I went over the words he missed and the little mistakes he repeated, such as not reading the suffix ending. He asked about the definition of some words. When I made up a sentence leaving a blank for the missed word, he then understood it by context. Collecting, analyzing, recording, and using the assessment data took 1 1/2 hours.

This assessment showed us that a mistake this student makes is not looking all the way to the end of a word. It did not reveal his excellent understanding of words in the contexts of sentences. I also realized more than ever the effect of noise, movement, and unfamiliar surroundings on learners with disabilities

Conclusion

Assessment, when discussed with and owned by the adult learner, is a teaching tool. I become a better teacher by trying new strategies, as indicated through assessment, to meet the needs of the students.

Adult learners reach many achievements that are not reported on the Scantrons.

Problems that face the assessing practitioner are lack of time and uniformity. Many assessment related duties cannot be completed in the classroom, but must be done after school. I fill out all of the student Scantron forms ("bubble sheets" or data forms) at home, posting the assessment results to be sent to Richmond. I realize that these tests are not being given in a standardized way. The noise, movement, crowded conditions, heat, cold, fear, and other factors affect the test taker. It is difficult to get a true reading level when a student is craving a cigarette, loud noise is all around, and the teacher is trying to teach a class simultaneously.

Adult learners reach many achievements that are not reported on the Scantrons, including improved eye contact, communication, participation, class discussion, and computer skills. Students learn to ask for help, attain certain social achievements, and experience elevated self-esteem and increased feelings of accomplishment. Student learning is also influenced by the assessment process itself. With each test, the student should learn more test-taking skills. Hopefully, through repetition, his fear of test taking will subside.

It is sometimes difficult for me to separate the assessment process (what actually happens) from its influence on teaching and learning. I consider myself a learner first and a teacher second. I have interviewed my students and learned of their embarrassment at not doing well. I hear their complaints about the inadequate conditions and their questions of why they have to take tests during their first class period. During the process I have dissected my own classes, practices, procedures, and products. It is my hope that the work of this Assessment Study Group will cause educators across the state to recognize the current deeds and needs of practitioners, and that we will bring ideas and concerns to the table for discussion. Together we can equip adult learners for the future--personally, academically, and socially.

Paula Mullins
Wise County Schools

KATE ROSENFIELD

Setting

I coordinate and teach in a family literacy program called Families Learning Together. I am employed by the local adult education center but our program meets at Johnson Elementary School in Charlottesville. The school provides classroom space, a computer lab, cafeteria, library, a playground for the preschool children who attend, and staff support. It is an environment that welcomes parents and families.

This is my fifth year at Johnson. I work 18 hours per week. My job includes 8 hours in the classroom, as well as time for lesson planning, coordinating transportation and child care, hiring and supervising child care providers, recruitment and retention, report and grant writing, in-service training, staff meetings, interagency group meetings, and referrals.

This year our day program includes an adult education class, a parent discussion group, and a monthly family dinner with a family activity. The adult education class meets 2 days each week for 2 1/2 hours per day. Parents are preparing for the GED, improving reading, writing, and math skills in order to help their children with homework, practicing keyboarding to increase their job opportunities, and discussing employability skills. Three retired volunteers help with the class. A tutor from Literacy Volunteers of America works with individual students who are new readers and with small groups. A semi-retired professor of chemical engineering helps students with math. Sometimes he works with one student, and he also works with small groups. The third volunteer worked in the New York City schools as a teacher, guidance counselor, and school administrator. She is the facilitator for our parent discussion group, which meets once a week for an hour. This year the group is discussing the importance of a positive self-image.

An evening program for the family meets 2 times each week; it has 7 adults and 15 children participating. The school age children have tutoring; preschool children have child care; and parents have an adult education program and a monthly family activity. In addition to the three volunteers, my staff includes a part-time Title I teacher, 3 child-care providers, and 12 volunteers for the evening program.

The parents in the group are diverse. There are 10 parents who attend, and ages range from 19-45. They come for different reasons: they want to increase skills to get better jobs, help their children learn,

get a GED so that they can attend vocational or college classes, or they are attending as part of a Department of Social Services work experience program

Any parent in the city is welcome in the class as long as there is space and child care. Referrals come from local community agencies and friends and family of students in the class. Transportation assistance and on-site child care are needed by most of the parents in the group and are provided by the program.

This year our program funding came from several different sources including local government and schools, Central Fidelity "Tutors for Success" program, the Regional Literacy Coordinating Council, a civic club, and a private donation. We just received a grant from the Junior League for our summer program.

Assessments

When a student begins class, I do both an informal and formal assessment. We talk privately about their educational goals, present and future, and any adult education classes they have attended. We also discuss choices each student has about working individually or in a small group. I think the most important part of the interview is making sure the new student knows that this is her class, and the goal is to meet her needs. The student completes an information sheet required by the adult education center that includes reasons for attending, health problems, special needs, and emergency contacts. For reading and math, I use the SRA assessment that is also used by our adult education center. Before the student begins the assessment, I explain that it is used to determine where to begin reading and math lessons and not graded pass or fail. This tool gives a level for beginning lessons. After the student has attended class for about 3 weeks and seems comfortable in class, I give the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) for a more accurate reading and math level. I have concerns that the TABE is intimidating for some students and that is my reason for waiting to administer it.

Time for Assessments

Since formal assessments are used to identify skill levels, plan lessons, evaluate progress, and build student confidence, they need to be given with clear instructions. Time needs to be taken to explain the assessment tool, score the test, plan lessons, and provide on-going evaluation of progress. As a part time teacher, I need more time to assess students' progress.

Making assessments a priority is easy in planning; finding the time is difficult.

A student in our class asked to take the TABE test a second time to measure her progress. She had been in class for about three months, but other students were taking the test, and she was interested in determining if she had progressed since coming to class. It was the first time she had discussed her learning with me. We talked about the test; she took the first part and worked hard. The next day of class, she was hesitant about continuing, but she decided to go ahead and finish. But she didn't take much time and her scores on the two last tests were lower than the first. I needed to spend some time to discuss her reluctance, but there were many distractions that day, and I never did have the chance to talk with her. She was a very young student and needed the support.

Making assessments a priority is easy in planning. But actually finding the time to spend on assessments is difficult. Our class meets 5 hours a week; how much of that time can be spent on assessments without limiting other responsibilities or completing necessary work at home on my own time? Since this is a family literacy program, I would like time to use assessments to evaluate whether parents are more involved with their children's education after attending the program, if they are more confident in their parenting skills, and if learning is becoming a family involvement. Again finding the time is an issue.

Reflections

In addition to focusing on our study group's research questions, other questions have come up during the course of this study:

What other formal assessments are available and how are they used?

Am I just assessing whether students are able to pass the GED or also assessing whether they are learning to solve problems?

Does our class encourage students to evaluate their own progress?

Since joining this study group, I have learned about different formal assessment that are being used. Some of these tests might be useful to the students I work with, and I would like to know more about them. I need more information about what assessments are available, what they are used for, and how to use them. I am concerned about the effect of formal testing on a new student who may be very anxious about coming back to school. Is it better to do a shorter, less intimidating test when a student first comes to class and wait to do the TABE until the student is settled in class? Even though some assessments may not be as accurate in assessing skill levels, are they accurate enough to get a

student started? Do we lose students because they are intimidated by the assessment?

Formal assessments provide information about progress in specific learning skills—information that is needed to plan lessons—but communication skills, self-confidence, attitudes, and barriers to progress also need to be evaluated. Informal assessment goes on all the time. The students in our class use journals each day of class. They write about what they learned that day, factors that affected their learning, what they liked and didn't like about class, what feelings they had and what they wish they learned or knew more about. The journals provide on-going evaluation for meeting goals; they also provide writing practice. Sometimes our students write essays about what it takes to feel confident, how to communicate with people at work, or why learning is important. I would like to know more about what other teachers use for informal assessments.

When students first come to class, we talk about their goals. They almost always say they want to get a GED, and they seldom express any other goals. Sometimes when we are talking about employability skills or parenting issues, someone will say, "Will this be on the GED?" I want to use assessments to evaluate whether lessons are helping students acquire skills to meet future goals as well as the skills needed to pass the GED. What assessments can I use for this kind of evaluation?

Students in our class wanted to plan their own schedules. Some of the parents were very concerned that they learn as much as possible in the 5 hours a week they are in class and asked me to work out a class schedule with them. The result was very ambitious and included a lot of different subjects in each week. But they agreed to try it for 2 weeks and evaluate whether it was working. We actually tried the schedule for 4 weeks, and they found that there were too many subjects each day. They cut back, and the new schedule was satisfactory. As a result of this experience, they are planning other activities for the summer program. I hope they will continue to take this kind of interest in class, and I would really like to have a way to assess what students are learning from these kinds of experiences.

Additional Questions

Additional questions that I have about assessment are as follows:

1. Is there a way to standardize assessment instruments for all classroom settings (learning centers, correction facilities, family programs, ESL classes) so that we can all be trained in what the tools are and how to use them?

2. Does class setting determine which assessments are used? For example, do we use different assessments for family programs than a correctional facility would use?
3. Is there a way to evaluate whether the assessments being done in our classroom are effective?
4. How can teachers effectively share their assessment ideas with others?

Kate Rosenfield
Families Learning Together

AMY
STALLINGS

Setting

Lunenburg Correctional Center is located in the small rural town of Victoria, Virginia. The prison houses approximately 1200 adult males. The Virginia Department of Correctional Education offers several educational programs to promote rehabilitation, including the Literacy Incentive Program (LIP) in which I am a teacher. I am employed by the state of Virginia and receive all benefits given to state employees.

My duties include: teaching classes; completing paperwork that is required by the state; developing Individualized Learning Plans and following special education guidelines; interviewing, hiring, and training teacher-aides; selecting and ordering materials; and conducting and attending staff development workshops.

Three vocational classes are offered: Water and Waste Water Works, Building Maintenance, and Masonry. Three academic classes are also available: GED preparation and two LIP classes. The Literacy Incentive Program was developed as a joint effort by the Virginia Department of Corrections, the Parole Board, and the Virginia Department of Correctional Education.

Offenders entering the correctional system are required to take the Test of Adult Basic Education. (TABE). Any student who scores below the 8th grade level on the reading section, regardless of having a high school diploma or GED, is classified as LIP eligible. There are about 200 inmates on the waiting list for these classes. With consistent attendance and active participation in the class, students may earn points towards parole and job status within the prison. Participation is voluntary, but LIP eligible students who refuse to attend will lose points towards early parole and will not be able to hold certain jobs while at the prison. Most inmates have a positive attitude towards school and look forward to attending, but there are a few who resent having to come. These few rarely make it past a few weeks in class due to excessive absences or unacceptable behavior.

I have been teaching in the LIP class since February of 1996. I teach four 90 minute classes with 12 students each. Each class meets five days a week. The first class begins at 8:15 a.m. and the last class ends at 3:25 p.m. I have hired 6-8 inmate teacher-aides (I try to keep 8 aides, but the number is always changing due to transfers, parole, etc.). Because of my experience as a reading instructor, I receive the inmates that are reading from 0-5th grade. The ages of my students range from 18-67.

The academic classes offered are held in the programs building, where I have my own classroom. Within my classroom I have four computers; two are for student use. We also have a beautiful library as part of our school. It is open to the inmate population and any materials I need are readily available to me.

Test for Adult Basic Education

Various types of assessment are conducted within my classroom regularly. The majority of students entering my classroom have taken the TABE, either upon entering our system or at another institution where they were attending school before being transferred to Lunenburg. However, the scores are often outdated and do not reflect current levels. I administer the TABE to all students every four months. These scores are used to determine if the student is still LIP eligible and to develop new individualized learning plans.

I administer the TABE over a three day period. Each class takes one or two sections each day during the 90 minute class period. The TABE is administered formally: students are not permitted to leave the classroom after the testing begins; there is absolutely no talking during the test; and time limits are followed exactly. Any student who refuses to take the test or follow the administration guidelines is dropped from the school.

The tests are sent to another prison where they are scored and returned to me, usually within a week. At this point, I sit down individually with each student and review the scores. The time used for this and for developing the new plan of study is about 30-45 minutes per student. We discuss areas of improvement and areas that need to be worked on. The information on the sub-tests is used to develop realistic goals, and it helps me decide which books are appropriate for the students. I can also pick specific units from a book that I want the student to work on. For example, if a student does well on capitalization but not on usage I will assign the usage section of the language book for intense study and capitalization for review. This way time is not wasted working on areas the student has already mastered. By comparing scores from previous TABEs with current results, I am able to evaluate the effectiveness of each student's learning plan.

The TABE has proven to be more valuable than I originally thought it would be. At first I didn't think it gave enough information and realized I would have to give additional diagnostic tests to get specific information on which skills the student needed. I still believe that additional information is needed, but I have found that the TABE is valu-

able in many ways. I have been working at the prison long enough to have administered two sessions of the TABE. After the first administration I used the scores to pick which level books to assign. The students began at the front of the books and worked through them. Most students also worked one subject at a time—for example, finishing the reading book before starting on the math.

When the second set of TABEs were evaluated, I noticed that some students had not made any progress in certain areas and great progress in others. This prompted me to go back and look at the original plans and the student's progress through the books. I found that most of the students who had not improved in a particular area had never gotten to that part of the plan or that unit in the book. Also, some students who had worked on a skill had completed it so long ago that possibly they had forgotten it. The second evaluation completely changed my approach to writing the next learning plans. Specific units in a book were assigned instead of whole books. Students where asked to study every subject each week and review often what they had learned.

I will administer the TABE again in July, and I am very anxious to see if this new approach has made a difference in the scores. I think that giving a formal test like the TABE every 4 months is quite valuable in determining the effectiveness of a program. It provides me with the valuable information needed to make frequent changes in course work and then check to see if the changes were effective.

Diagnostics

Though the scores from the TABE are useful, they have some limitations. Sometimes the student may earn a score that indicates a move to the next level. Almost every time a student moves up a test level, his subsequent scores drop or show no improvement. I realize that this is probably due to the large error of measurement present when a student takes a test not designed for his level, but this is very discouraging to the student.

Therefore, when a student enrolls in my class for the first time I like to give some diagnostic tests of my own. Sometimes the TABE scores are out-dated or not reflective of the student's true abilities. When first entering the system, the student may just mark any answer because he is upset about being incarcerated. He doesn't understand or care about the consequences of not doing well on the test. I like to administer a general reading test that will give me a starting point. I use the Botel Comprehension Test. This gives me a reading grade level. The student is asked to read words at various levels and then find a word of the op-

posite meaning from a list of four words. If the student scores low on this test, I will administer a reading profile that I have developed (see page 53 of this report). This profile identifies specific areas of deficiency. I use this information to develop specific objectives, decide on the books, and determine which aide would do the best job with this student. The initial reading screening takes from 15 to 45 minutes depending on the need to administer the profile.

A math diagnostic test is also administered to each new student. A pretest with whole numbers is administered first; if the student does well, it is followed by a fractions test, then percentages and decimals, then ratios and proportions. Again this information is used to write objectives and choose books. The time needed for the administration of these tests varies greatly. Some students are not successful beyond the study of whole numbers; students work at different speeds, etc.

The last diagnostic test I give is a writing test (page 58). The test is designed to check for errors in capitalization, punctuation, sentence structure, and word usage. Some of the students are unable to attempt the test because they are unable to read; the students that are able to complete the test take from 30 to 60 minutes. If students are unable to read the test, I encourage them to write a paragraph on what their goals are for the class. The information learned from the scores on the test determine which units the student needs to cover.

Teacher-Aides

In my classroom the teacher-aides play a very important role. Each teacher-aide is assigned 1-3 students to work with each period. After the student and I complete his learning plan, a teacher-aide takes over as the primary instructor. I keep track of each student's progress through notes written daily by the teacher-aide and the student. During class I walk around and visit each table to check on progress and help when needed. Sometimes I will do some teaching which is for the benefit of not only the student, but also the teacher-aide, who can watch how I teach certain things. I make sure that the teacher-aide is following the plan and that the lessons are appropriate for the student. While I am assessing student progress, I am also assessing the teacher-aides, watching for areas where I can help him become a better instructor. I feel that my responsibility to assess and teach the teacher-aides is just as important as my responsibility to the students. I do monthly evaluations on each teacher-aide and a six month evaluation that is used to determine pay increases and points towards early parole.

The assessments I currently use assess the objectives I have determined to be important. What if these objectives and goals are inappropriate?

Constant checking and questioning is done with every lesson by the teacher-aides. Each assignment given to a student is an assessment. This tells the teacher-aide if the student understands the process or needs more instruction. Most books have unit reviews. The teacher-aides have been instructed to administer all unit reviews without giving any help to the student. If a student has not accomplished the unit (less than 90%) the aide is to see me. I then sit down with the student and teacher-aide and help develop a plan of action. This may include doing a part of the unit over, assigning an additional book, doing some re-teaching, or whatever else seems appropriate. After some additional instruction the student must retake the unit test and show me the results. If a student passes a unit test the teacher-aide puts this information on a daily progress chart that is kept in each student's folder. I check these folders at least three times a week. If a student completes a book he is awarded a certificate. Before I will award a certificate, the student must show me the book and I ask him many questions to be sure he has accomplished the set goals. I use this information to assign new goals and books. This process can take 15-30 minutes.

I spend 2-3 hours synthesizing and comparing TABE scores. I can compare scores from students assigned to a specific teacher-aide and check if there are any general trends. If I notice that one particular teacher-aide has students with great gains or students with no gains I begin to watch closely for possible reasons. It has been interesting to note that the teacher-aides with the most experience generally have students that make the most gains. I also decide if a particular teacher-aide seems to do well with students that have severe reading problems. I will try to assign these students to this teacher-aide. I have newer teacher-aides observe and learn from the stronger, more experienced aides.

It is very important for me to check behind the aides often. As I was studying my assessment techniques for this project, I discovered that the teacher-aides did not really understand the importance of assessment. On too many occasions, the teacher-aides would continue a student through a book without checking to be sure the student understood the concepts. When I would meet with the student after he had finished a book, it became obvious that he had not really learned much. He had completed the written work in the book but had not grasped the concepts or objectives of each unit. I did a workshop with the teacher-aides to explain the importance of assessment and show how the information we derive from assessment determines what we do next.

Progress Folders

Each day the student writes progress notes telling me what he worked on that day and at least one thing he learned. He also makes himself an assignment for the next day. The teacher-aide completes an individual progress sheet for each student. He writes which book and pages the student completed and comments on progress or problems. This is the place where he keeps track of unit test scores, reading profile graphs, and book completions. As I check a student's folder I look at both the student's notes and the teacher-aide's notes; this is very helpful to me for monitoring student progress. There is a place for me to write comments to the student and teacher-aide. The information in the students' folders is invaluable.

Checking these folders takes considerable time. Each period takes at least 20-30 minutes depending on how much I comment on each progress note. It is difficult to find the time during the school day to do this and often I have to take folders home. Sometimes I do the folders during class time, this way I can sit with the student and discuss progress. This takes the whole 90 minute period so I am unable to do this every day. This is probably the most important assessment done. The information in student folders directly affects instruction and learning on a daily basis.

Conclusions

Assessment is an invaluable tool for teaching adults. It gives students and teachers a direction in which to plan and helps us find out if we are reaching our goals. After working with this study group and learning about Equipped for the Future, I wonder what exactly our goals should be for adults and if we are working towards accomplishing valid goals. The assessments I currently use assess the objectives I have determined to be important. What if these objectives and goals are inappropriate? Does that mean my assessments are invalid? I suspect so.

Now that we know what happens during assessment, it seems that further study needs to be done <u>after</u> goals and objectives have been established for adults. I wonder how significant it is for a 40 year old man to know the short "a" sound. Yet, if he does not know it he may not be able to learn how to read. I really don't know the answer myself and would love to see some research done that would help me make better decisions about teaching adults.

Amy C. Stallings
Lunenburg Correctional Center

READING PROFILE STUDENT FORM

1. SEGMENTATION (no student page)

1-A. Number of words in a sentence.

Listen to the following sentences. Use one paper clip for each word in the sentence. Tell me how many words are in each sentence.

Examples: Dick walked.
Mother works hard.

_____ 1. John smiled.
_____ 2. She went shopping yesterday.
_____ 3. Bill and I were playing cards.

Total correct: _____

1-B. Initial Consonants

Listen carefully to the following words. Tell me the sound that starts each word.

Example: cat /c/ - /at/

_____ 1. pet (p-et)
_____ 2. cold (c-old)
_____ 3. sit (s-it)
_____ 4. made (m-ade)
_____ 5. loop (l-oop)

Total correct: _____

1-C Final Consonants

Listen carefully to each word. Tell me the sound that ends each word.

Example: pan /pa/ - /n/

_____ 1. sun (su-n)
_____ 2. bad (ba-d)
_____ 3. hat (ha-t)
_____ 4. mop (mo-p)
_____ 5. leg (le-g)

Total correct: _____

1-D Segmenting Vowels in Words

Listen carefully. Put down a paper clip for each sound your hear and tell me the sounds in each word.

Examples: me /m/ - /e/
Ed /e/ - /d/

_____ 1. no (n-o)
_____ 2. up (u-p)
_____ 3. at (a-t)
_____ 4. if (i-f)
_____ 5. egg (e-gg)

Total Correct: _____

1-E Segmenting Words Into Sounds

Listen carefully. Put a paper clip down for each sound you hear and tell me the sounds in each word.

Example: Sam /s/ - /a/ -/m/
camp /c/ -/a/ -/m/ -/p/

_____ 1. hat (h-a-t)
_____ 2. slot (sl-o-t) or (s-l-o-t)
_____ 3. drop (dr-o-p) or (d-r-o-p)
_____ 4. cold (c-o-ld) or (c-o-l-d)
_____ 5. stripe (str-i-pe) or (st-r-i-pe) or (s-t-r-i- pe)

Total correct: _____

2. AUDITORY DISCRIMINATION

2-A Initial Consonants

Listen carefully to the *beginning* sound in the word I say. Then listen to the beginning of two more words. Tell me which word begins with the same sound as the first word.

Example: feather (farmer, girl)

_____ 1. dog (ditch, farm)
_____ 2. mother (hand, ,ask)
_____ 3. cough (couch, hope)
_____ 4. jump (jelly, fire)
_____ 5. yellow (weather, yeast)
_____ 6. ghost (sense, get)
_____ 7. wire (fence, west)
_____ 8. hope (hollow, fire)
_____ 9. baby (basket, vest)
_____ 10. little (man laugh)
_____ 11. toast (think, test)
_____ 12. sun (mean, soup)
_____ 13. number (next, vine)
_____ 14. zebra (zoo, lady)
_____ 15. fence (last, fight)
_____ 16. parrot (book, pig)
_____ 17. rose (river, next)
_____ 18. vest (house, vine)

Total Correct: _____

2-B Final Consonants

Listen carefully to the *last* sound in a word. Then listen to the last sound in two more words. Tell me which word ends like the first word.

Example: hat (door, fit)

_____ 1. cab (robe, sash)
_____ 2. hog (raft, big)
_____ 3. man (laugh, pin)
_____ 4. stop (sweep, tear)
_____ 5. leave (save, more)
_____ 6. call (sun, full)
_____ 7. road (mud, girl)
_____ 8. like (pick, tent)
_____ 9. lime (egg, seem)
_____ 10. core (tear, moon)
_____ 11. dress (home, base)
_____ 12. haze (mean, doze)

3. SOUNDS AND LETTERS

3-A Names of letters

Name the following letters.

____ E	____ I	____ W	____ B	____ h	____ F	____ P	____ S
____ n	____ v	____ A	____ m	____ K	____ T	____ r	____ g
____ U	____ L	____ l	____ o	____ e	____ z	____ D	____ C
____ M	____ Q	____ f	____ x	____ R	____ q	____ N	____ j
____ b	____ a	____ G	____ Y	____ d	____ H	____ J	

3-B Sounds for Consonants

Tell me the sound that each letter stands for.

____ k	____ w	____ n	____ v	____ d	____ H	____ s	____ x
____ R	____ t	____ f	____ L	____ G	____ M	____ j	____ B
____ c	____ P	____ z	____ y	____ qu			

3-C Sounds for Short Vowels

Read the following nonsense syllables.

____ ab	____ af	____ az	____ im	____ ik	____ ip
____ uf	____ un	____ ut	____ ob	____ ol	____ om
____ el	____ ep	____ ek			

3-D Sounds for Long Vowels

Read the following nonsense syllables.

____ ake	____ ope	____ ine	____ ule	____ eal	____ eet
____ oap	____ ain	____ ay	____ ite		

3-E Initial Consonant Blends and Digraphs

Listen for the *beginning* sounds for each of these words. Circle the letters that make these sounds.

Example: sm tw fr

1	bl	br	dr	6.	pr	tr	st
2	gl	gr	pr	7.	gl	cl	sk
3	st	sl	sk	8.	tr	br	dr
4	pl	pr	tr	9.	th	tw	wh
5	wh	tw	fr	10.	tr	fr	dr

3-F Final Consonant Blends and Digraphs

Listen for the *ending* sounds in each of these words. Circle the letters that make the sound.

Example: nt st nch

1	nt	nk	nd	5.	sh	st	sk
2.	ft	st	th	6.	th	sh	ft
3	nt	nk	nd	7.	ng	nch	nk
4.	nch	nt	ng	8.	th	st	sh

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4. BLENDING

Read the nonsense syllables. These are not real words. Example: fap

1. sud
2. mag
3. rin
4. pom
5. tef

5. WORDS PARTS

5-A Endings

Look at the word. Change each word by adding an ending.

Example: party *parties*

1. high _____
2. sun _____
3. fast _____
4. cry _____
5. match _____
6. slow _____
7. nice _____
8. big _____
9. carry _____
10. valley _____

5-B Substituting beginning consonant sounds

Read each word. Change the beginning of each word to form a new word.

Example: luck → truck

1. sell _____
2. turn _____
3. mop _____
4. dish _____
5. back _____
6. hen _____
7. art _____
8. tank _____
9. top _____
10. ten _____

5-C Substituting vowel sounds

Read each word. Change the vowel in the words to make a new word.

Example: nut → net

1. pack _____
2. ship _____
3. hot _____
4. fan _____
5. stop _____

5-D Compound words

Put together each word from list 1 with a word from list 2 to make another word.

List 1	List 2	New Word
after	ball	_____
base	boat	_____
bed	children	_____
book	dog	_____
down	dose	_____
grand	keeping	_____
over	noon	_____
row	room	_____
side	town	_____
watch	walk	_____

5-E Contractions

Read the word. Write the two words that it comes from. Example: it's → it is

1. I'm _____ _____
2. wasn't _____ _____
3. what's _____ _____
4. we'll _____ _____
5. you're _____ _____
6. don't _____ _____

Read the two words. Write the contraction they form. Example: you will → you'll

1. will not _____
2. he will _____
3. I have _____
4. does not _____
5. he is _____
6. have not _____

5-F Suffixes

Write the missing endings in each blank. Use each ending once.

-al	-hood	-ness	-ous	-ly
-ful	-less	-ment	-or	-ship

1. Income tax is paid year_____.
2. He spent a sleep_____ night tossing and turning.
3. They moved to a new neighbor_____.
4. The presidents of the two countries signed an agree_____ not to test their bombs in outer space.
5. It is danger_____ to drive if you have been drinking.
6. He makes few mistakes because he always does a care_____ job.
7. She was voted the new govern_____ of our state.
8. If you were not born in this country, you will need to have your citizen_____ papers when you register to vote.
9. I don't want anyone else to read that letter. It's too person_____.
10. I will never forget your kind_____ to me when I was in trouble.

6. Comprehension (Botel) _____Level

7. Word Recognition (Botel) _____Level

WRITING EXAM

DIRECTIONS: In each group, find the sentence that has CAPITAL LETTERS in all the right places. Put the letter of the sentence that is correct on the answer sheet. DO NOT WRITE ON THIS EXAM!!!

01. a. Your muscles help you move.
    b. your skeleton supports your body.
    c. your brain controls all your actions.

02. a. Fish sleep with their eyes open.
    b. horses sleep standing up.
    c. otters float on their backs.

03. a. earthworms do not have eyes.
    b. earthworms do not have ears.
    c. They see and hear through their skin.

04. a. Superman was really clark kent.
    b. He was adopted by john and martha kent.
    c. Mr. and Mrs. Kent raised Clark in Smalltown.

05. a. Abraham Lincoln's picture is on every penny.
    b. Alexander hamilton's picture is on most nickels.
    c. Some dimes have a picture of Franklin D. roosevelt on them.

06. a. The astronauts could not find the moon on Sunday.
    b. Are twins usually born on tuesday?
    c. Never broil food on friday!

07. a. The shortest day of the year is december 21.
    b. The second-longest day is june 21.
    c. During July and August, the days are usually sunny.

08. a. The largest state is alaska.
    b. The second-largest state is texas.
    c. The smallest states are Rhode Island and Delaware.

09. a. Basketball was invented in springfield, massachusetts.
    b. Baseball was first played in Copperstown, New York.
    c. Football became a sport in england.

10. a. On Hospital Drive, you can find memorial hospital.
    b. Lyndon high school is on School Avenue.
    c. The First National Bank is on Bank Street.

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11. a. The nile river is in Africa.
    b. The Amazon River is in North America.
    c. The mississippi River is in North America.

12. a. My neighbor has a beautiful Siamese cat.
    b. I have a large german shepherd.
    c. My brother wants a french poodle.

13. a. The candian flag has a picture of a maple leaf.
    b. The swiss flag has a white cross on a red background.
    c. The Japanese flag shows a red circle on a white background.

14. a. Little House On The Prairie.
    b. Little house on the Prairie.
    c. Little House on the Prairie.

15. a. "How to grow a Garden"
    b. "How to Grow A garden"
    c. "How to Grow a Garden"

DIRECTIONS: In each group find the sentence that has the right PUNCTUATION. Put the letter of the sentence that is correct on the answer sheet.

16. a. Which is the largest planet?
    b. Jupiter is the largest planet?

17. a. Mules are stronger than donkeys.
    b. Are mules stronger than horses.

18. a. Are there clouds in outer space?
    b. There are no clouds in outer space?

19. a. Mr. Harvey Kennedy invented the shoelace.
    b. Dr James L. Plimtpon invented roller skates.
    c. Mr Walter Hunt made the first safety pin.

20. a. 870 Claremont Blvd
    b. 6 Boston Rd
    c. Canary St.

21. a. The alarm clock rang at 7:15 AM.
    b. I stayed in bed until 7;30 AM.
    c. At 8:15 Am, I caught the school bus.

22. a. The Civil War began on Friday , April 11, 1861.
    b. The Battle of Gettysburg was fought on Wednesday, July 1 1863.
    c. Both sides agreed to end the war on Sunday April 9, 1865.

23. a. Texas became a state on December 29 1845.
    b. Wyoming became a state on July 10, 1890.
    c. Utah became a state on January 4 1896.

24. a. John Adams was born in Quincy Massachusetts.
    b. George Washington was born in Westmoreland County, Virginia.
    c. Thomas Jefferson was born in Albemarle County Virginia.

25. a. Winters are cold in Buffalo New York.
    b. Winters are warm in Miami, Flordia.
    c. What are winters like in Savannah Georgia?

26. a. Buckingham Palace is in London England.
    b. The Kremlin is in Moscow Russia.
    c. The Taj Mahal is in Agra, India.

27. a. We get power from the sun air and water.
    b. The power can heat houses schools, and other buildings.
    c. People, plants, and animals need warmth.

28. a. We planted carrots corn and tomatoes.
    b. We watered, weeded, and watched the garden.
    c. We kept it safe from birds insects, and animals.

29. a. Animals can't live without air.
    b. Fish ca'nt breathe above water.
    c. Whales cant stay under the water too long.

30. a. Its always raining somewhere in the world.
    b. It's always sunny somewhere else.
    c. Somewhere, its' always night.

31. a. A horse's tail is long.
    b. A pigs tail is curly.
    c. An alligators' tail is very strong.

32 a. The mens' team scored five points.
    b. The womens team also scored five points.
    c. The children's team scored nine points.

DIRECTIONS: Tell whether each of the following sentence is a SENTENCE or a FRAGMENT.

33. We all hate to call a doctor.
    a. sentence b. fragment

34. If our doctor should not be available.
    a. sentence b. fragment

35. High fever which lasts more than twenty-four hours.
a. sentence b. fragment

36. You need medical help if you have repeated headaches.
a. sentence b. fragment

37. Go to the emergency room at once.
a. sentence b. fragment

DIRECTIONS: For each of the following write the letter of the SIMPLE SUBJECT.

38. Puffy white clouds appeared in the sky.
a. puffy b. clouds c. appeared d. sky

39. We shouldn't disobey the rules.
a. we b. shouldn't c. disobey d. rules

40. The schools in the city are closed on Labor Day.
a. the b. schools c. city d. closed

41. Hot, humid days make me lazy.
a. humid b. days c. me d. lazy

42. People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.
a. people b. glass c. throw d. stones

DIRECTIONS: For each of the following write the letter of the SIMPLE PREDICATE.

43. John walked down the stairs.
a. John b. walked c. down d. stairs.

44. The sun disappeared behind the clouds.
a. sun b. disappeared c. behind d. clouds.

45. My favorite show was on TV.
a. favorite b. show c. was d. TV

46. A squirrel darted into the bushes.
a. squirrel b. darted c. into d. bushes

47. High above the trees flew the flock of geese.
a. flew b. flock c. of d. geese

DIRECTIONS: Write the correct letter for the TENSE of the following sentences.

48. The dog barks at the cat.
a. present b. past c. future

49. The whistle blew four times.
a. present b. past c. future

50. Thomas will sing on Sunday.
a. present b. past c. future

51. My sister and I ran after the man.
a. present b. past c. future

52. Abraham Lincoln became president in 1860.
a. present b. past c. future

53. She accidentally tore the dishcloth.
a. present b. past c. future

54. She is a very good friend.
a. present b. past c. future

DIRECTIONS: Choose the letter of the VERB that agrees with the subject.

55. A basket of apples _____ in the corner.
a. set b. stands c. lie d. stay

56. My grandfather _____ noodles by hand instead of by machine.
a. make b. rolls c. fix d. create

57. Americans _____ begun to use this system, too.
a. has b. just c. does d. have

58. Modern canoes _____ made by hand.
a. isn't b. wasn't c. won't d. aren't

59. There _____ millions of stars in the sky.
a. is b. be c. are d. was

60. Symbols have _____ the place of words in many signs.
a. took b. taked c. tooked d. taken

61. P. T. Barnum _____ his three-ring circus in 1871.
a. begun b. began c. beginned d. beganned

62. Ice must be _____ and melted for drinking water in Alaska.
a. breaked b. broke c. broken d. breaken

63. Tom _____ his new camera to the party.
a. bringed b. brought c. brung d. bring

64. In Alaska traveling is often _____ by dog sled.
a. doed b. did c. done d. doned

DIRECTIONS: Write the letter of the word or words that go in each sentence.

65. Many people don't know _____ about fish.
a. nothing b. none c. anything d. not a thing

66. Some people think that fish don't _____ sleep.
a. never b. not c. ever d. hardly never

67. A baby platypus doesn't have _____ fur when it hatches.
a. any b. not a bit of c. none d. no

---

1. A
2. A
3. C
4. C
4. A
5. A
6. C
7. C
8. B
9. C
10. B
11. A
12. C
13. C
14. C
15. A
16. A
17. A
18. A
19. C
20. A
21. A
22. B
23. B
24. B
25. C
26. C
27. B
28. A
29. B
30. A
31. C
32. A
33. B
34. B
35. A
36. A
37. B
38. A
39. B
40. B
41. A
42. B
43. B
44. C
45. B
46. A
47. A
48. B
49. C
50. B
51. B
52. B
53. A
54. B
55. B
56. D
57. D
58. C
59. D
60. B
61. C
62. B
63. C
64. C
65. C
67. A

GAYLE VON KEYSERLING

Setting

I am employed by our county school system as a part-time teacher for the daytime adult education class. The class meets twice a week for three hour periods. I am paid for six hours of instruction and two hours of prep time. There are no benefits nor consideration given for work done beyond those hours. Occasionally, I am able to attend a workshop for which mileage and registration expenses are reimbursed. We are a small, rural county with limited resources.

Due to the generosity and interest in community of a local furniture factory, we have a place in which to meet. The factory has two rooms for the purpose of training employees. We use the smaller room (about 11' x 15') on a regular basis and occasionally are able to utilize the larger room for private conversations or testing. Our classroom setting consists of two 8' tables in the center of the room and five desks with Apple IIe computers. One wall with a door is common to the factory; as a result, noise can be an inhibiting factor. The other door to our class adjoins the larger training room. This room is sometimes used for employee training while we are meeting, so again noise can be a disruption. Freedom of movement can also be limited since one has to walk through this room to exit the building or to use the restrooms. Since our classroom is used by others, I carry all confidential records as well as many of the materials used in class to and from each session.

The county maintains an open enrollment policy for adult education classes. As only one day class is offered, the student body is quite diverse. Nine students are currently enrolled: one male alternative education student from the high school, one female English as a Second Language (ESL - Spanish) student, two females working toward the General Educational Development (GED) exam, and five Adult Basic Education (ABE) students (one male, four females). The majority of the students originally came to the class at the recommendation of various agencies, i.e. welfare or child health. This year, I have a volunteer who tries to come in for one hour per week. Some weeks, she comes for longer periods; some weeks, she is not able to come at all. I appreciate her willingness to help as it enables me to talk with students in private if the larger training room is available. There are no other adult educators on site. Our program administrator is a full-time elementary teacher; adult education is just one of her many responsibilities.

Entry Assessment

Each student is evaluated upon registration. Entry assessment involves both formal (standardized placement) and informal methods (questionnaires, interview, and a writing sample). I place no time constraints upon students during this testing, which is done primarily for the following reasons:

1. To obtain a placement level at student entry.
2. To obtain a beginning and ending level for state reporting.
3. To measure progress (to monitor areas of weakness or strength).
4. To overcome fear of testing.
5. To build confidence.
6. To familiarize students with a testing format which ultimately will be used for the GED.

Formal Assessment

Once placement testing has been completed, the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) or Practice GED is used for formal assessment. During testing, I usually look over homework or plan the next class session while observing students and their interaction with the testing instrument. Although these tests do yield results and are beneficial for placing students in appropriate materials, testing does take away from available instruction time or independent work. In order to do either of these formal assessments, two class periods are devoted almost entirely to testing. As we meet twice a week, I try to schedule testing for class periods in two separate weeks in order that testing does not become the sole focus for an entire class week.

Although I normally test an entire class at one time, most student feedback is done in private. I use this one-on-one time to encourage a student to keep trying in areas of weakness as well as to affirm progress. These conversations are often a reality check for students. Formal assessment provides a tool for me to illustrate the amount of material yet to be mastered and to encourage a student not to "throw in the towel". My goal is for the student to view me and the formal assessment as an instrument of encouragement and motivation rather than a voice of doom.

I spend 5-10 minutes sharing general information with the entire class. It takes me approximately 15 minutes to score a complete TABE and another 19 minutes to record and convert scores for GED comparison. I evaluate each test looking for patterns of error as well as mastery in

order to share this information with each student. Depending on the ability of the student, it may take me 20-30 minutes to analyze a test battery. Scoring and analyzing is all done on my personal time at home. I then spend another 15 minutes per student reviewing individual results. This is done during the time students are working independently.

Informal Assessment

Informal assessment is conducted through observation and is prompted by the formal assessment process. Questions which may be on my mind would include:

Is my student encouraged/discouraged by the test results?

Does the student's body language communicate a positive or negative reaction? What about the verbal comments?

Is the student concerned about a specific skill or test area?

Is the student able to draw conclusions as a result of the testing which impact what he/she will pursue in class?

How much testing is too much for a particular student?

Although formal assessment yields concrete results, it is informal assessment which connects me to the student.

Many times informal assessment yields information which has little to do with formal instruction, but rather reveals information about the personal life of the student. This information is important as it may have an impact on testing or may be impacting current class work. Adult learners do not check their personal lives at the door of the classroom! Personal situations can and do impact student performance.

Thus, I find that even when conducting formal assessment, informal assessment plays a very real role. Although formal assessment yields concrete results, it is informal assessment which connects me to the student. It is informal assessment which focuses on the students as individuals: their needs, goals, and personalities. It informs me of students' needs and attitudes rather than their abilities alone. Without observation I would never have considered giving a student scratch paper for use during the language portion of the TABE. As a practitioner, I must be alert to student "vibes" in order to be an encourager as well as a facilitator of their learning. I believe it is my role of encourager which drives much of the informal assessment I do within the classroom setting.

During class, I frequently find I am "dual tracking." While working on a group lesson, I will be watching and listening for indicators which reflect involvement and understanding on the part of the students. This

ongoing observation is so much a part of what I do that I think much of it is done on a subconscious level—until I notice someone is not "with me." At this point, dual tracking kicks in. Although I continue with the lesson at hand, one part of my mind is analyzing the students' responses. This exploration can trigger a conscious response on my part and sometimes the focus of the lesson will change due to the attitudes/needs of the students at the moment.

This type of informal assessment helps me stay tuned to the students. If I am not responsive to my students, they have trouble being responsive to me. If they feel they have ownership in the class and its activities, they are more likely to stay involved. As a result, class retention is improved. A classroom driven by student needs must have flexibility on the part of the teacher. Teaching and student learning are interrelated.

Time spent "doing" informal assessment is hard to determine. Yes, I can say I spend 10 minutes on an informal intake of a student or I spend 3 minutes informally going over a homework assignment. But calculating time doing informal assessment when one is "dual tracking" is difficult. In addition, there is time spent outside of the classroom. Teacher reflection—on individuals, class situations, questions, etc.—when removed from the actual class environment is another means of facilitating learning in a class or an individual. Is this not also assessment? How does one begin to calculate this time?!

Personal Impact

Informal assessment facilitates student learning but also provides personal satisfaction. Although I derive satisfaction from teaching, the class is for the students. I can not allow my agenda to be so rigid that I lose sight of the needs and desires of my students. Although I am usually not troubled by this, I found during a case study for this project that this was actually happening. In my effort to track time for the purposes of the study, my focus had shifted from the students to the study. This had a definite negative impact on me! Data collection had become the focus rather than the student(s). This was a reality check for me and the refocus was good. In the future, anytime the process begins to supersede the individual, warning lights should go off.

As a result of doing data collection for this study, I have had to re-examine my classroom priorities. I have learned that I spend more time thinking about why something did not work than I do analyzing what made this a good class day or why a particular student was so "in

tune". At other times, I've had new insights—even a "blinding flash of the obvious!" I have gained new ideas from my peers and the reading we have done throughout the project.

The project has raised new questions as well as brought old questions to mind. Just as students ask questions to learn, so must adult practitioners—if we are truly lifelong learners. It is my hope that the questions and concerns raised as a result of this study will be considered and reviewed in order that we can better meet the needs of both practitioners and students. Some of the questions I am left with include:

1. How might the Student Teacher Evaluative Planning Sessions (STEPS) be changed to make it more applicable to my group? Should another instrument take its place?
2. Is there a standardized test which would yield valid results but take less time than the TABE? Should guidelines be written for administration of the TABE so that all practitioners are giving the instrument the same way? Or does that impact the student in a negative way?
3. Limited funds force teachers to copy material which infringes on copyright laws; how else do we get enough material into the hands of the students?
4. Is there a difference in the way part-time and full-time practitioners view assessment?
5. Is the focus of the practitioner different if the student is voluntary or involuntary?
6. Is the assessment focus different due to mandated requirements imposed by the employing body?
7. How does the make up of the class impact the type or frequency of formal assessment?
8. How can teacher observation be standardized for state reporting? Should it be?
9. Does the adult education program stand on its own merit or is it a "P.S." to the local school system where space and budget issues may result in adult education receiving what is left over?
10. What will it take for state agencies and legislators to accept the fact that it is not realistic to expect the average ABE student to be ready for GED testing in 90 days?

Gayle von Keyserling
Fluvanna County Schools

Personal Learning Plan

Name:_____ Soc. Sec.# _____.

Phone:_____ Address:_____.

Birthday:___/___/___. _____.

Education: (Circle highest grade completed)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

	YES	NO
Do you have children in school?	____	____
Are you handicapped?	____	____
Do you receive any public assistance?	____	____
Are you homeless?	____	____

What was your Best Subject in school? _____

What subject was the hardest? _____

What would you like to read better (books, magazines, work materials)?_____.

What type of math problem do you have trouble with?_____.

Place an "x" in front of the items below that you want to work on:

Long Term Goals:
_____Driver's License
_____Citizenship
_____Helping child with homework
_____Register to Vote
_____G.E.D.
_____Find employment

Short Term Goals:
_____Improve reading
_____Improve writing
_____Improve math
_____Improve job skills
_____Improve life skills (road signs, bills, applications, etc)

Ways in which I can reach my goals:

1._____ 2._____ 3._____.

Emergency Information
Name of person to notify:_____ Relationship to you:_____.

Work phone number :_____ Home phone number:_____.

Format instruction:
Following information to be printed on back of PERSONAL LEARNING PLAN

NAME:_____.
Placement 1.) Date:_____ Reading_____ Math_____.
Placement 2.) Date:_____ Reading_____ Math_____.
Placement 3.) Date:_____ Reading_____ Math_____.

HELP ME GET TO KNOW YOU

A. 1. Write or print your name_____

2. What is your address?_____

3. What is the date today?_____

4. Do you have a telephone?_____What is the Number?_____

5. Are you married?_____ What is your spouse's name?_____

6. Where were you born?_____

7. What is your birth date? ___/___/___

8. What are the ages of your children? _____

B. 1. Are you a citizen of the United States? _____

2. Are you a citizen by birth or by naturalization?_____

3. Are you a registered voter in the State of VA? _____

4. Do you have a valid driver's license? _____

5. Do you own a car? _____ If so, what kind?_____

6. Are you employed? _____ Full-time_____Part-time_____

7. Where do you work? _____

8. How long have you worked there? _____

9. Do you subscribe to a newspaper? _____

10. What magazines do you read?_____

11. Do you own a T.V.? _____ a VCR? _____

12. What are your hobbies? _____

13. What do you like to do in your free time? _____

14. Please answer either fine, good, fair, poor, or bad to the following questions:

a) How is your vision? _____

b) How is your hearing? _____

c) How is your general health? _____

C. 1. How did you hear about this class? _____

2. Please tell me why you have decided to join our class? _____

_____

3. What do you hope to gain from the adult education program? _____

_____

_____

4. How do you like to learn new things? This information will help me plan class time which will be the most help for you. _____

_____

_____

5. Please write a short paragraph about yourself. Is there anything else you would like me to know that will make this class better suited to your needs?

Thanks for helping me get to know you better.

(Adapted from: Extension Teaching & Field Service Bureau. Div. of Extension, The Univ. of TX at Austin. Permission to reproduce granted to Adult Education Programs.)

Recommendations for Assessment Practices

When the Assessment Study Group gathered for our final meeting on June 20, 1997, we brought with us our written reports, our still unanswered questions, and our new questions about assessment practices in Virginia. We discussed these questions and some possible answers, envisioning an adult education environment conducive to systematic yet flexible assessment practice.

We arrived at three main recommendations regarding adult education assessment practices in Virginia:

1. Establish the Soundness of Current Assessment Techniques.
2. Use and Evaluate a Greater Variety of Assessment Tools; Emphasize Assessment of Non-Academic Areas.
3. Increase Adult Education Resources as they Support Assessment Practices.

Establish the soundness of current assessment techniques.

Use and evaluate a greater variety of assessment tools; emphasize assessment of non-academic areas.

Increase adult education resources as they support assessment practices.

Recommendation 1: Establish the Soundness of Current Assessment Techniques.

The Assessment Group raised a variety of questions about assessment practices currently in use. A comparison of the practices and instruments used across the group provoked a call for more information and training on assessment tools. Questions focusing on the issue of validity or "soundness" of the current assessments include:

1. Is there really a way to evaluate whether current assessment methods are effective?
2. Is there any common ground regarding assessment or is each practitioner doing something different?"
3. Is the assessment aligned with learners' goals?
4. Once the goal setting process has been completed, whose goals and objectives are really being assessed?
5. Are we only assessing what certain assessments assess, or are we truly measuring progress toward appropriate learning objectives?
6. Do our current practices mesh with EFF's framework of 4 fundamental purposes for learning in the context of real world roles? Do they mesh with conclusions of the Performance Indicator retreat and with the goals of the HELIX initiative?
7. Do we need statewide testing standards?

Descriptions of our own uses of "standardized" tests gave rise to many questions about the TABE and other standardized instruments:

8. To what degree are standardized tests being administered in a "standardized" way?
9. Is there a right or a wrong way to give a published, standardized instrument?
10. How important is adherence to time limits with standardized instruments? Some teachers time the TABE and some don't. How do these differences impact learners, teachers, programs, a state's accountability system, and a community's understanding of adult education services?

Questions regarding the validity of current standardized instruments also focused on the STEPS process. We suggest that an evaluation of this process should focus on the following questions:

11. Are teachers and learners currently using STEPS? If so, how?
12. Does the STEPS process collect the information that we need and want to know?
13. Is it being implemented systematically in programs and across the state?

Our other questions focused on the teacher's role in the assessment process:

14. Who decides what is an appropriate learning objective?
15. If the teacher alone identifies learning objectives and/or assessment methods, how valid are they?
16. Who decides when a student's initial testing (pre-post formal assessment) occurs?

Recommendation 2: Use and Evaluate a Greater Variety of Assessment Tools; Emphasize assessment of non-academic areas.

Group members expressed a keen interest in learning about assessment techniques and tools <u>other</u> than what we currently use. Though alternative formal and informal measures are included, we have a special interest in developing ways to document learning and achievement in terms other than reading, writing, and math, i.e., tools that assess the acquisition of life skills and changes in attitudes and behavior.

The study group hopes that the State Office will officially adopt additional and alternative means of assessing growth and change. We would like to have a wider variety of "authorized" tools from which to choose. We want to know which instruments are appropriate, which are available, and how to get them. We suggest that someone compile and present a comprehensive overview of currently available assessment materials. The group is also concerned with who will help implement new techniques and who will provide on-going support. Exploratory activities could come in the form of regional workshops/institutes, individual research projects, and focus and study groups.

The following questions relate to any investigation of new assessment materials and techniques:

1. What areas of growth should we be assessing in addition to or instead of what we are already documenting?
2. How credible are informal assessments?
3. Do we have a common understanding of what is meant by informal, authentic and standardized assessment?
4. Can we find a systematic way and a common language in which to communicate the accomplishments of all adult learners, i.e., those who are participating in family literacy and ABE programs with those who are incarcerated or learning the English language?
5. When and how could the bubble sheet become a more flexible, inclusive reporting form?

And again:

6. Will these practices mesh with EFF's framework of 4 fundamental purposes for learning in the context of real world roles? Will they mesh with conclusions of the Performance Indicator retreat and with the goals of the HELIX initiative?

Recommendation 3: Increase Adult Education Resources as they Support Assessment Practices

The Study Group expressed the need for more training and professional development opportunities and raised the following questions related to education resources (i.e., time and money) as they support assessment:

1. Should someone other than the teacher be responsible for assessment/testing, e.g., para-professional/instructional assistants?
2. Should assessors be paid on a per student basis?
3. What policies exist regarding the number of student hours per teaching hour, and how do these policies impact teaching and learning?
4. What impact will initiatives such as HELIX and EFF have on existing programs that operate without a corps of full-time teachers or adequate facilities?
5. Can teachers who are only paid for hours of instruction be expected to keep up with and acquire new knowledge about best practices?
6. Can programs consistently deliver results that matter given the inconsistencies across the system with regard to frequency and intensity of services?

Recommendations for Future Study Groups

From January to July, 1997, the members of the Virginia Assessment Study Group had three opportunities to formally evaluate the project. Members received evaluation forms following the first meeting and at the end of our work in July. We also evaluated the project with a view to forming future study groups.

Based on our discussions and our written evaluations, we can make 3 recommendations concerning the formation of future study groups.

1. Clarify the purpose and objectives of the project and adhere to them.
2. Group members by interest or instructional setting, and as much as possible, by locality. Develop a strong network of communication between group members.
3. Provide compensation commensurate with the work requirements.

Recommendation 1: Clarify the purpose and objectives of the project and adhere to them.

> *I realized at our first session that our study group would not focus on the original questions [on the application]. Once we decided to "capture the reality of our current assessment practices," my expectations changed accordingly. Our data collection and narratives followed suit. I am, however, concerned about how useful this information will be to other practitioners.*

My original expectation was not met at all. I had thought we would be field testing a new assessment -- maybe a new/different STEPS or standardized tool. Once our three questions were established, I was interested in them as they related to me and my students, but I did find it hard to let go of my original expectations.

[There was] confusion on the part of participants as to the group's purpose and some resentment that a few stated goals from the application were not considered in the study.

I would recommend a more clearly defined purpose from the beginning. This would help to prevent misconceptions and wasted time.

Recommendation 2: Group members by interest or instructional setting, and as much as possible, by locality. Develop a strong network of communication between group members.

I wonder if consensus might be reached sooner if the practitioners involved in the group come from similar settings.

Identify goals and objectives before the groups are picked. Let people sign up for or pick the goals of interest to them.

A list of study topics to choose from would be great!

Recommendation 3: Provide compensation commensurate with the work requirements.

Assessment Study Group Members averaged 100 hours on this project. This included time spent reading, attending group meetings, in travel, e-mail and phone conversations, collecting data, reporting, and (for some) presenting at VAILL, a summer staff development conference.

I am interested in continuing with the study group, but realistically there would have to be adequate compensation.

I was amazed at the amount of time I spend at home doing adult education "stuff." I knew scoring, recording, and analyzing formal assessment instruments took time, but I hadn't realized how much time!

Conclusion

The members of the Assessment Study Group represent the wide range of program types, settings, and adult learners that comprise Adult Education in Virginia. Their stories reflect a high level of commitment to their students and to their own professional development. All of the researchers expressed an interest in continuous improvement.

> *I learned a lot looking at my own assessment practices, and writing the report was a great learning experience, as well as a frustrating time. I am much more aware of my own methods of assessment and have tried to be more thorough in explaining and using assessments for planning lessons and group work. I also learned and felt more confident about the importance and value of informal assessment.*

> *The most important idea I heard discussed is that Richmond [Department of Adult Education] is willing to revamp forms in order to show varied assessments of the adult learner. It is an important concept that we humans develop, learn, and know more than what is revealed in a reading and math level.*

Knowing that educational research often results in new administrative or instructional materials and techniques, the Virginia Assessment Study Group carried out its work with the hope that others would consider the final report and its implications for improving Virginia's Adult Education programs.

We provide this list to assist you in your own exploration of assessment and evaluation issues.

Taken from: "Outcomes and Measures in Family Literacy Programs" a publication of the National Center for Family Literacy, Louisville, Kentucky, 1996

Our appreciation to NCFL for this resource.

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Reader Responses Invited:

The Research Network and members of the Assessment Study Group are interested in your thoughts on this project. Please take a moment to answer the following questions:

1. Has this report been useful/relevant to you in any way? If yes, how?
   a. Are the assessment practices reported here similar to what you are doing or not? How similar or how different?
   b. Did you have questions about assessment that were addressed here? What were they and how were they answered?

2. What questions or issues of assessment do you still think need exploring?

3. Would you like to receive information regarding future Research Network Assessment Study Groups?

You may reply via mail, fax, or e-mail to:

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Dayton VA 22821

(540) 879-2033 FAX

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Name: _____

Address _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____